



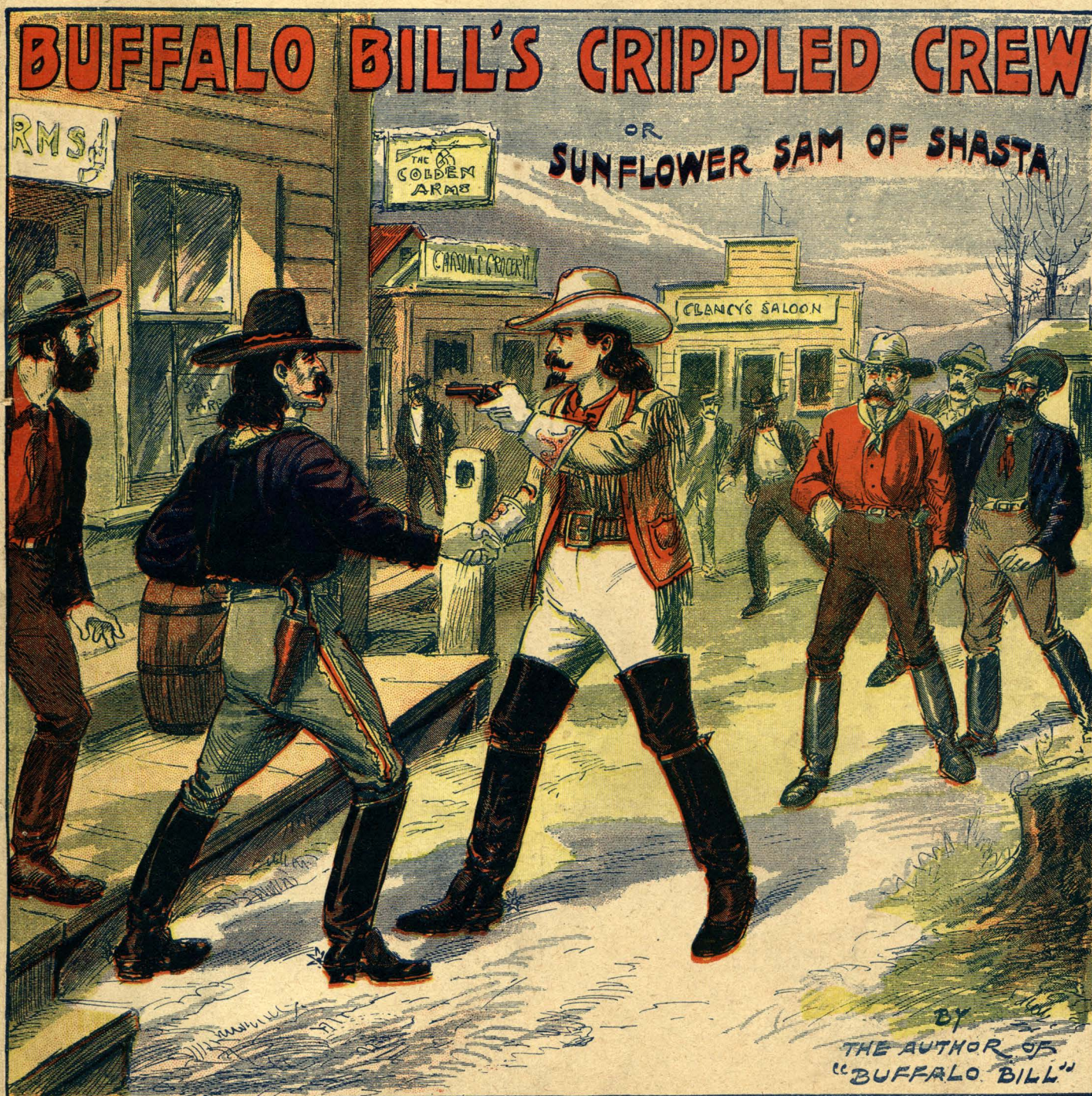
THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION
DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 90.

Price, Five Cents.



STILL GRASPING THE HAND OF THE NOW WHITE-FACED RUFFIAN WITH HIS RIGHT HAND, BUFFALO BILL CLUTCHED IN HIS LEFT A SMALL DERRINGER PISTOL.



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No. 90.

NEW YORK, January 31, 1903.

Price Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S CRIPPLED CREW;

OR,

Sunflower Sam of Shasta.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

MIDWINTER IN DEATH VALLEY.

Death Valley—so called from a superstitious belief among bordermen that every explorer who entered it was doomed to die in a mysterious manner—was one of the dreariest, grimmest-appearing spots on the Western frontier.

It was on the extreme border, beyond the uttermost confines of civilization, and owing to its unsavory name and reputation was as bare of inhabitants as the great Sandy Desert.

It was shunned alike by redskin and white man, miner and settler, outlaw and honest settler.

The Western winter—an unusually cold one—had transformed Death Valley into a white expanse of snow.

People on the trail through the snow to and from Yellow Dust City, a nearby mining settlement, who looked toward the deserted spot shuddered as they thought of the dreadful fate that must befall any human being lost in that white wilderness.

And yet there were human beings there.

What would have looked to a passerby like an oddly-shaped mound of snow was in reality a retreat, half shanty, half cave, built against a cliff—a snug shelter for men and horses.

Within a fire burned brightly, the smoke escaping through a cleft in the rocky wall of the cliff against which the shelter was built.

Around the fire was grouped a curious-appearing lot of men.

Two of the figures that showed out in the flickering firelight were well known to all bordermen.

They were Buffalo Bill, chief of scouts—at present attached to the frontier post of Fort Rescue, and his side-partner, the surgeon scout, Dr. Frank Powell.

The other men, seven in number, were a sorry-looking crew.

Every man of them was crippled.

Some lacked a hand and some lacked a foot.

They had evidently undergone some mutilation recently, for their stumps of arms or legs were all freshly bandaged, as though the wounds were not yet quite healed.

These men—who later became famous throughout the borderland as Buffalo Bill's Crippled Crew—had suffered a terrible wrong at the hands of some of the inhabitants of Yellow Dust City.

They had formerly formed a band of men known as the Blue Belt Brigade, worked a mine in the neighborhood of Yellow Dust City and always acted under the leadership of Burt Boyd, one of the men who now sat crouching

by the fire with a bandaged stump to indicate where his right hand had been.

Owing to a number of crimes committed in Yellow Dust City, the Blue Belt Brigade had been ordered out of the town by a body of volunteer vigilantes under the leadership of a well-known border character, who, owing to the fact that his shirt was ornamented with imitation sunflowers and that he hailed from the neighboring settlement at Shasta, was known among the miners and frontiersmen as Sunflower Sam of Shasta.

He had ordered the Blue Belt Brigade out of town, saying that although they might not have been guilty of the crimes charged against them, that it was considered best for the peace of the community.

He had supplied the outcasts with food and blankets, bought their claim from them at the magnificent price of \$100,000, and although several desperadoes led by a tough citizen named Scalplock Sam had urged—in order to curry favor with the better element in the settlement—that the Blue Belts be hung, they had been permitted to start off with their money.

They had headed for Death Valley, being forbidden to go to any settlement.

There they had been overtaken by a band of masked men, who, robbing them of all they had, mutilated them as has been told, and left them to die in a blizzard which had come up.

They would have died had not Buffalo Bill discovered them in the snow and fought his way to Fort Rescue in order to get provisions for them.

He, with abundant supplies and accompanied by Frank Powell, had returned to the aid of the seven members of the Blue Belt Brigade who remained alive, eight having died from their hardships.

In spite of the cold and snow, the two scouts made the seven poor outcasts comparatively comfortable in the shelter they had built for them.

Then they started out questioning them in order to find out if possible the identity of the masked men who had committed the outrage of maiming as well as robbing them.

Both felt that whatever the crime of the injured men had been, they deserved no such punishment as had been inflicted upon them. Both felt that it was their duty as government scouts to bring to justice the men who had done such an outrage.

"How many men were there in the party that robbed you?" asked Frank Powell of Burt Boyd, the leader of the Crippled Crew.

"Twenty-seven," said Boyd, "and they were all thoroughly masked."

"Ha!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill, "the same day that I found these outcasts in the snow I also discovered another party of men lost in the blizzard. They said that they were miners, that they had gone on a prospecting trip and that they had lost their way in the snow. I guided them to Yellow Dust City. They were just twenty-seven in number."

"The work of amputation done on these men," said Dr. Frank Powell, "is the work of a skilled surgeon. Is there any such in Yellow Dust City?"

"Yes," said Burt Boyd, "there is a doctor there—an

old man—Old Rhubarb is the only name I have ever heard him called by."

"He is a quack. He could never do such neat work. Here's something we might identify the doctor by, though. Did you notice whether the masked man who amputated your members wore a ring?"

"By Jove! he did," cried several of the Crippled Crew at once.

"It was a massive gold ring with a large ruby in it," said Walt Webster, one of the band, "and he appeared to be the leader of the masked men. He had two assistants, one who seemed to know what he was about and one who seemed inexperienced and who shuddered when the surgeon cut into the flesh."

"Was there no reason given for this mutilation?"

"There was," said Burt Boyd. "They told us that they were punishing us for our crimes, and that they were still giving us a chance for life."

"Did none of his men raise a word against his act?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Not one, sir, that any of us were aware of?"

"You were fifteen in number?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now you are seven?"

"Yes, Mr. Cody."

"Eight of us have gone under," was the sad reply.

"Well, we will talk it all over to-morrow, again, and see if we cannot happen upon other clues, for I shall go from here to Yellow Dust City."

"And to-morrow I will have something to tell you all, and we can compare notes," said Buffalo Bill, and soon after all had turned in for the night.

CHAPTER II.

A SECRET TO TELL.

New life had been infused into the band of Blue Belts by the coming of Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, the supply of food and the warm clothing they had received.

The dressing of their wounds, and the hope that was now before them, inspired the sufferers so that they appeared like different men the next morning.

"This cabin is all very well, pards, for a makeshift, but not for a winter abode."

"It will be the very place for the horses, but not for you."

"I can swing an ax pretty well, and we'll set to work upon a cabin at once," said Buffalo Bill.

Good trees were selected and quickly felled by the scout, his way of "swinging an ax pretty well," as he has expressed it, winning the admiration of all.

The men who had been left their legs intact among the Blue Belts dragged the logs to the side of the cliff, where Surgeon Powell was busy building a chimney of rocks.

By noon the chimney was finished, enough logs had been cut for the cabin, and all was going rapidly, the men who had their arms, but were minus a leg, making rude tables and benches.

In the afternoon the cabin was put up, save the roof.

The next day the chinks between the logs were closed with clay, small saplings formed the roof, foundation, and then pine straw thatched it thoroughly against leaking.

A shelter of the same kind was made in front, to sit under, bunks were put up inside, the table and benches followed, and then the making and swinging of two windows and the door, on leather hinges, cut from an old saddle, occupied the third day.

The door and windows were in front, made of plaited boughs, and upon the outside pine straw was fastened so as to make them close and secure.

The fireplace was large, occupying nearly one end of the cabin, and all the wood cut was piled up outside close at hand.

"The pine balsam in the walls and roof will benefit you men, and your house is snug, clean and comfortable, so keep it so, for upon that depends your health," said Surgeon Powell.

The old shanty back of the cabin was to be used for the few horses left to the Blue Belts, for Buffalo Bill intended taking the pack mules back with him, as there would be little corn left if they remained long, and this was to be fed to the horses that remained only when they could get no grass in the canyon.

As the snow melted quickly, and grass grew luxuriantly in sheltered places, it was not thought that the horses would suffer very much.

With the end of the fourth day the work had all been done, the men had moved into their new quarters, and they certainly looked very cheerful and comfortable in contrast with their last shanty house.

Tired at night and retiring early, little had been talked of among the men, but now that all was ready, and the scout and the surgeon had spoken of starting upon their return the next day, Buffalo Bill said:

"It was my intention, Mr. Boyd, to go to Yellow Dust from here, but I shall return with Surgeon Powell to the fort.

"We cannot leave to-morrow, for I saw signs of a second storm coming on, and I do not care to face another blizzard in the saddle.

"We will go as soon as it is over, to the fort, and then I shall visit Yellow Dust City shortly afterward.

"It will be a couple of months before you will need supplies again, but I will be here with them on time, or to guide you all to the fort, if you are able to go, and that I think would be best."

"As I do," added Surgeon Powell.

Captain Boyd and his men had listened with deep attention to what the scout had to say, but at the last remark about going to the fort, he looked at his men in a curious way, and replied:

"We will be well enough, sir, beyond a doubt, for, with the kind care of Surgeon Powell we all feel like new men.

"You, sir, have saved our lives, and we wish to be guided wholly by you.

"But you know we are exiles, outcasts, yet, outlawed, and we should go to the fort under a deep shadow of crime.

"What our past has been I do not now care to discuss, but I wish to say this—that we should like to remain here until the spring.

"Then we will be wholly well and able to act, and it is our intention to act, a crippled crew though we are, that we'll make ourselves felt.

"We all have a wrong to avenge, a cruel wrong, but,

outside of that, we have another duty to perform, and we have vowed to do it.

"The twenty-seven men who dogged us to our doom, a worse doom but for you, must each one be found or accounted for.

"The truth is, Mr. Cody, we cannot speak now as we would, but when you return in two months, as you promise, we will be ready to talk, to make known to you, sir, and to Surgeon Powell, a secret, but to no one else."

The words and manner of Burt Boyd were impressive. Both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell felt this, and the former said:

"All right, Boyd, I leave it to you what to tell, and what not. You may have been guilty of many crimes in Yellow Dust, but you have been most cruelly punished for your deeds.

"I bear no ill will against you, and I frankly tell you I shall do all I can to protect you from further persecution, and Surgeon Powell will aid me.

"Tell the secret you refer to in your own way and time, but now let me tell you what I promise to do the night of our coming here."

CHAPTER III.

PLEDGES TO AVENGE.

"I told you, pards, that I led a party of freezing men into Yellow Dust City after leaving you," said Buffalo Bill.

All nodded.

"I started for the fort, and could have reached there before the storm became too severe, but I looked for a camp for supper and a short rest, and came upon this party of whom you speak."

"Men out of Yellow Dust, sir?"

"Yes, Boyd; they said they had been out prospecting."

"I wonder if they had not been out prospecting for us, to see that we went to no other camp, or did not halt near Yellow Dust?"

"Boyd, there were just twenty-seven of them."

"My God! Can they have been the band that crippled us?"

"That was their number."

"But they would have returned before the time you met them, sir?"

"You had a slight snowstorm soon after they left you."

"Yes, sir."

"Might they not have gotten lost?"

"Would not one man in twenty-seven have been able to find Yellow Dust again?"

"Not unless thoroughly acquainted with the country.

"The snow changes the whole aspect of the land, you know."

"Yes, but that was some weeks ago."

"And you had another storm, you remember?"

"Yes, sir."

"That would have made it still worse for them."

"True, sir."

"Did you observe that your foes had large supplies, along?"

"Not much, I should say. They had no pack animals."

"These men I found were lost and out of food."

"Were they masked?"

"They were not."

"They would hardly be, when they expected no one to see them."

"But they had on masks. Several of the men riding in the rear put masks on to protect their faces from the biting cold."

"That settles it, sir."

"I pretended not to notice the masks."

"And you guided them to Yellow Dust, Mr. Cody?"

"Yes, twenty-five of them, for two perished with the cold before we reached there."

"You found out who they were, then?"

"I did not stop at the Golden Arms, the hotel where they put up, but rode to the cabin of Sule Ross, the principal storekeeper, and got some supplies before going on."

"You took chances to go on."

"I knew where I could halt in Cave Canyon for the night and be that far on my way, for after meeting those men, I dared not go out of Yellow Dust with supplies, as I at first thought of doing, not to have you wait so long."

"I made the ride to the fort all right, though but for these shelters on the way I would never have gotten there, and I killed my two horses in doing so."

"No other man would have gone through," said Boyd, earnestly.

"Well, few are as tough as I am, and can stand as much cold."

"But to those men?"

"Well, sir?"

"I took particular pains to jot down each face in my memory."

"Ah!"

"Of course, they were all muffled up, head and ears, so I could not tell the color of their hair, even."

"But I noted their ears and what distinguishing marks I could, their voices and horses, and I am sure I could pick a fourth of them out without trouble."

"The others I will have to make sure of in some other way."

"Do you intend to try to find them out, sir?"

"I intend to spot each and every man."

"If they drove you out as outlaws, they must be hunted down as wholesale murderers, for they have caused the death of over half your band."

"They did not fight you openly, manfully, but sought, Indian-like, to murder you by the most cruel torture."

"I saved their lives, so I have a hold upon them, and each one of that band I shall know and bring to justice."

Buffalo Bill spoke in a manner that showed he was deeply moved.

He had entered upon the trail of justice with a will to reach its end.

Boyd Bernard at once arose, and, stretching forth his hand, said:

"Mr. Cody, the cause that you have taken upon yourself to champion in the name of justice is our cause, and, all revenge aside, we make you our leader, for, as an officer of the army, you cannot lead simply an avenging crusade; but we will aid you, and what you can and will accomplish will be far more than avenging our wrongs."

"I accept the charge, men, and I say woe be unto those who perpetrated the foul wrong upon you!"

"And I not only say amen to this, Cody, but I am with

you on this trail to stay to see the bitter end, for such a crime shall not go unwhipped of justice, no, not against an Indian should it," declared Frank Powell, who had sat an attentive listener to all that had been said, and whose whole sympathy was with the wretched remnant of the band of Blue Belts, be their sins in the past what they might.

CHAPTER IV.

A BOLD VENTURE.

Buffalo Bill proved to be a good weather profit, for the wind began to howl mournfully during the night, and when morning came a first-class blizzard was in full progress.

The wind was blowing at a seventy-mile-an-hour force, the snow was falling in blinding sheets, and the animals in the former cabin had cause to congratulate themselves that their masters had moved to other quarters.

The scout was out early to look to their comfort, they were led to water, then fed, and the shanty closed to the piercing tempest and intruding snow.

In the cabin the fire blazed cheerily and over and over again the Blue Belts thanked Buffalo Bill for his thoughtfulness for them.

"I believe we would have had a hard time in the shanty, though we were so much better, by contrast, with what we had suffered we did not know how bad it was," said Burt Boyd.

The driving and insinuating snow quickly showed the men where the weak points of the new cabin were, and they soon had them remedied.

A good breakfast followed, and then there was nothing to do but talk away the long, long, weary day.

Surgeon Powell had killed a couple of wild turkeys the day before, a deer, and several of the men had caught a large string of fish, so that fresh edibles were plentiful.

The fury of the storm soon blew itself out, the snow ceasing to fall before night, and the wind going down by dawn of the next day.

After a look at the heavens Buffalo Bill decided to start, as soon as he had taken a short round with Surgeon Powell after game.

A mule was taken along, and in an hour they returned with several fine deer and other game, for it would be some little time before the best off of the Blue Belts would be able to hunt for themselves.

The wounds of the men were given a good treatment and fresh dressing by Surgeon Powell, who gave orders what to do when he was gone, and, after an early dinner, the two brave men bade good-by to the Blue Belts, and, mounting their horses, started on their trail back to the fort, the mules in leading.

The Blue Belts stood under the shelter across the front of their cabin, watching the surgeon and the scout ride down the canyon, following them with cheers as long as they could see them.

"When Buffalo Bill comes here, comrades, he will have been to Yellow Dust City and discovered much."

"Then our secret must come out; he must be told all."

"Heaven grant that in rescuing us no harm befall him, but we had no friends in Yellow Dust City, not one whom

we could call upon to aid him if he needed it, and in that camp they are no respecters of persons."

So said Captain Boyd, as the two friends disappeared from sight, and his words implied that there was a secret to tell, one that Buffalo Bill must be told when he next visited the winter camp of the Blue Belts.

In the meanwhile the two comrades, in their second bold venture together, pushed on as rapidly as they could, knowing full well that it was little less than a life-and-death struggle back to the fort.

They did not spare their horses, for the cold was intense, and they wished to reach the shelter of the pines for their night camp, where they had camped on their way to succor the outlaw band.

They saw night coming on rapidly, but were near their camping-place, and reached it at sunset.

The best that could be done to shelter themselves and their horses was done, but it was an uncomfortable night for man and beast alike, and all seemed glad when the start at dawn was begun.

The weather was not settled, the wind blew half a gale, and lowering clouds were gathering, so that it was with a sigh of relief that Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell reached the old stockade cabin at nightfall.

Out of the cabin went yelling a pack of coyotes, and Buffalo Bill said, humanely:

"I dislike to see even those coyotes forced out into such a night as this."

The snow was already falling, and Surgeon Powell remarked:

"Yes, how they stand it I do not know; but there is not room inside for the coyotes and ourselves, Bill."

"Hardly."

The horses felt well satisfied in their snug shelter, and their masters were well content over their pipes, after having enjoyed a good supper, the very howling of the storm outside making them feel the more comfortable.

"How is it outside, Bill?" asked Surgeon Powell, when Buffalo Bill looked out the next morning.

"Bad, Frank, and growing worse. I would not be surprised if this blizzard held on for days, and, as we have none too much provisions, and the cattle are eating their last meal of grain, I say risk it to the fort."

"You are the guide, and you made it in a worse storm than this."

"Under worse circumstances, for I was well-nigh used up then, and alone. We can make it, though this is no blizzard any man wishes to be out in, though we have the storm at our back, fortunately."

"Before it was in your face?"

"Yes."

Half an hour after the start was made in the bitter storm.

CHAPTER V.

THE "KING OF THE BLIZZARD."

Only a short distance had been made when both Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell realized that it would have been better to have put up with scant provisions and discomforts for a few days at the stockade cabin than to have made the daring venture to reach the fort.

From the direction the storm came both knew that it was good to last several days, perhaps a week.

It seemed to increase in violence each hour, and to find the way required the boldest nerve and an iron determination not to give up.

Riding up alongside his pard, Surgeon Powell said:

"This is awful, Bill."

"It is indeed, sir. Are you very cold?"

"Not uncomfortably so; but the question is, can we stand it to keep on?"

"I never say die, Frank; but if you are cold, I'll turn back."

"Keep right on, Bill," was the plucky reply.

The plain that they knew they must cross before reaching the fort was at last reached, the bearing taken by compass, and Buffalo Bill and the surgeon changed from their horses to the largest, strongest of the mules.

The other animals were then lashed together two by two, and Surgeon Powell said that he would lead all, while Buffalo Bill devoted himself wholly to the duty of guiding, and that was a herculean task in itself.

On they went out upon the plain, the daring guide never wavering, never faltering.

Suddenly, when about halfway across, he halted.

"See there!"

"A fresh trail, by Heaven! Not half an hour old, I know it."

"Not so long as that, and a large one—fully a score of horses."

"Where can they be going?"

"They don't know; they are lost."

"We can overtake them?"

"Yes, easily."

"Then we will do just that."

"Yes, even if they were Indians."

"But they are not."

"No, iron-shod hoofs made those tracks, not Indians' ponies."

"We may lose our lives; but, then, it is duty."

"Yes, we must take the risk."

Buffalo Bill turned off after the trail, and soon saw that it was going at random.

"They are going in a circle, Frank, and death would end it before long."

He quickened his pace, and in a short while gave a loud whoop.

"Try it again, Bill, for this storm roars so a voice does not go very far, even your trumpet tones."

Again a whoop and another and another, as they rode along, until Surgeon Powell felt about his muffled form and drew forth a revolver. Then six shots were quickly fired.

A moment after came several answering shots.

Buffalo Bill pressed on with another loud whoop, Surgeon Powell following and also sending his voice echoing through the storm.

A few minutes more and they came upon a strange sight.

A party of twenty cavalymen were grouped together in a circle.

In their midst were several others, so closely muffled as to be almost unrecognizable, yet Buffalo Bill saw that

the horse of one bore the saddle of a general officer, that of the other had a woman's side saddle.

At sight of the scout, in spite of his wrappings, he was recognized, and a voice shouted:

"General, here is Buffalo Bill, sir! We are saved now, for he is the king of the blizzard!"

The soldiers gave three cheers, and Buffalo Bill called out:

"Why, Captain Adams, is it you?"

"Yes, Cody, escorting General Easton and his daughter from Yellow Dust City to the fort.

"We had one of your men, Scout Bowles, as a guide, but he got bewildered, went ahead to try and find his way, and we gave him up for lost, so pushed on, and here we are.

"But you can save us, Cody?" and there was something pleading in the tones of Captain Adams, as he glanced toward the young girl seated in her saddle, her eyes fixed upon the scout, as her father tried to reassure her that now they would be all right, for the renowned scout of the plains, and whom the captain had just named the king of the blizzard, would guide them.

"I will do what I can, Captain Adams, but not a moment is to be lost.

"There comes Surgeon Powell, now, and if your men will take the stock he is leading, he will go with me ahead.

"Come, sir, this is no time to tarry, for life hangs by a very slender thread in such a blizzard as this."

"We thought so a moment ago, Cody, but we all have hope now, for the king of the blizzard is our guide," replied the captain, cheerfully, just as Surgeon Powell rode up.

CHAPTER VI.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

Buffalo Bill was presented by Captain Adams to General Easton and his daughter, both of whom had heard much of the scout, and, on their ride from Yellow Dust City the captain had told them of his great trail through the blizzard, and that he was then away from the fort risking his life to aid a snowbound party in the Death Valley Mountains.

The general had started late upon a tour of inspection of the Western forts and had reached Gold Dust City in the last coach that came through that far.

Colonel Lennox, the commander at Fort Rescue, had been expecting him, and Captain Adams, one of his officers, had gone with an ambulance and twenty men to escort him to the fort, as it was known that his daughter would accompany him.

With the blizzards coming on nearly a month ahead of time, the general had been caught on the trail, but, unable to turn back, had continued on to Yellow Dust City, and there found Captain Adams.

It was decided to push right on to the fort, Miss May Easton going on horseback, as ambulances were out of the question, the captain having been unable to bring his through.

It was rough traveling all the way, but a deserted miners' camp off the trail, and known to Scout Bowles, had been reached the first night, and fairly comfortable quarters found.

The start had been made early in the storm, and at last Scout Bowles, as many a good and skilled guide had done, got bewildered, lost his way, tried to find it, and could not get back.

Then the party had pushed on to cross the plain, and had gotten irrevocably lost when found by Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell.

A few more hours and their doom would have been death.

Speaking decidedly, as Captain Adams turned over to him the command of the party, Buffalo Bill said:

"Saving your lives depends a great deal upon yourselves.

"Let every one keep alert, not give up to the cold, keep your horses close up.

"To drop back fifty feet will be fatal, and we cannot turn back to look for any one.

"Wrap up warm.

"Are you ready?"

An affirmative answer was given, and Buffalo Bill rode to the front.

Just behind him was Surgeon Powell, not by his side, for he said:

"You can do best alone, Bill, but if you want me I am right here."

Then followed two cavalymen with the led horses and mules to help break the way, and Captain Adams' men followed, then the general and his daughter.

Captain Adams brought up the rear to see that there would be no straggling of a half-frozen man from the line.

"How that man Cody finds his way is a puzzle to me.

"It seems as though we were simply going into an impenetrable snow bank," called back the general to Captain Adams, who answered:

"He is a mystery to all who know him in all that he does, sir.

"He has a compass, but one would be about as much use to me now as a foghorn."

On, on, through the pitiless, driving snow, the screeching, terrible wind, and the banking drifts went Buffalo Bill.

Bent low in his saddle, one muffled hand grasping the little compass, upon which his eyes were fixed, the other holding the reins, his spurs against the flanks of the large and powerful mule he bestrode, to keep him up to his work, the determined guide held on.

An hour passed, and the staggering, hard-pressed animals were cruelly feeling the strain.

But they all followed their leader.

The men, bent low, muffled from head to feet, yet half-benumbed with cold, sat in their saddles, each face hard drawn and stern, each gaze striving hard to pierce the clouds of white ahead, hoping for the sight of the wooded ridge they were striving to reach.

Was Buffalo Bill wrong, they wondered, as the time went on.

Was the king of the blizzard at fault?

Would they ever reach the goal?

Would the warm blood ever come through their benumbed veins again?

How they thought, how they hoped, and longed, and suffered.

Silent, with only a word now and then in cheery tones to the men not to give up, the brave daughter of a brave soldier sat in her saddle, looking anything like the lovely girl and graceful form she was, enveloped in blankets and bear robes.

Stern and fearful, not for himself, but for his daughter and the men, General Easton rode by her side, while, with a cheery call to his soldiers from time to time, the never-despairing and dashing Captain Charlie Adams brought up the rear.

Next to the indomitable guide rode Frank Powell, his stern voice now and then heard in a word of cheer to the men.

An hour went by, then another hour, and all knew that the ridge must be near, if Buffalo Bill was right.

If Buffalo Bill was wrong, all equally well knew that death was near.

Another ten minutes, and a shadowy mass appeared ahead.

"We have crossed the plain.

"There is a range of hills ahead of us," said Buffalo Bill, in tones as modest as though he had not proven himself a hero, the king of the blizzard, indeed.

But the men had heard, and a wild yell rose on the roar of the storm, and tears dimmed many eyes, freezing as they fell.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

A halt was made, but only for a moment; Buffalo Bill had struck a ridge; but he wished to see by his surroundings just where.

A moment's glance showed him, and he moved on along the range.

A short ride, and he turned into the foothills, overgrown with cedars, which protected all from the knifelike cutting of the wind.

A few moments more and they entered a narrow canyon, where was a small stream, but was now frozen hard.

Under the lee of a cliff there was no snow, the cedars grew thick, dead branches and logs lay about, and Buffalo Bill sprang from his saddle, calling out:

"Gather wood, men, and quickly.

"Come, don't be snails."

The order was needed, for the half-frozen men moved about with difficulty.

A fire was soon kindled, then another and another, the scout going from one to the other, while Surgeon Powell urged on some of the men in gathering wood, others in cutting holes in the ice and getting water to put on to boil, and also where their horses could drink.

The horses were led into the thicket, watered, blanketed and given a feed of grain.

Coffee pots were on boiling, steaks of venison were broiling, also bacon, and crackers were warming.

The men began to get thawed.

At a fire apart and well sheltered, Mary Easton was enjoying the scene, for she was not as cold as the others, so warmly had she been wrapped.

Captain Adams came soon with a soldier, and her father and herself were given a good meal.

But all could see that Buffalo Bill was anxious to be on the way once more.

The battle against the blizzard was not yet over.

There must be still another desperate fight.

None knew better than Buffalo Bill what those twelve miles meant.

He saw that the storm was increasing momentarily in fury.

Calling to Surgeon Powell, he said:

"We must get off, Frank."

"Yes, time is precious."

"If we had been out an hour longer on that plain half the men and horses would have died."

"I feared it all the while."

"We have yet a desperate struggle, for the storm is increasing."

"Yes, but how far off is the trail?"

"I can get into it in a ride of a quarter of a mile."

"Good!"

"But how few would ever reach the fort, if any, had it not been for this halt, hot coffee, food and thawing out?"

"You are right, it saved the outfit; but what a nervy girl that is!"

"Game, indeed and her father has shown great pluck, for he must suffer for her greatly."

"He does, and Captain Charlie Adams is one in a thousand. He deserves promotion for this trial."

"He does, indeed, and he is likely to get it, for he wins his way up."

"Well, I'll give the order to get ready now, so pour hot coffee down the outfit, Miss Easton included."

The cups of hot coffee were taken, the horses led up, blankets warmed, and Mary Easton was bundled up until she could hardly grasp her reins or see out of her mufflers.

The roll of blankets Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell carried were opened and spread around, for they were the best prepared of all for the blizzard, and at the order of the scout they all mounted, saw that there were no "sneak holes" for the penetrating winds, and the start was made in the same order as before.

The men saw Buffalo Bill ride to the front in the same confident way as before, and when he turned into the regular trail he showed that he knew what he was about.

On, on, he went, guided by the surroundings he caught sight of from time to time when the trail could not be seen.

They progressed slowly, and all knew that night would overtake them before reaching the fort.

Would the king of the blizzard fail them then?

On they struggled, and the storm still increased in fury. Soon the scout halted.

"Pass back this line and make fast to every horse.

"Night is upon us now, and there must be no hanging back!"

Such was the stern order of the guide, and then he moved ahead once more.

Darkness fell, and soon the form of Buffalo Bill could not be seen, for but a few paces about them could the men see.

Still on went the king of the blizzard.

"God knows how he finds the way," muttered the gen-

eral, and from the muffled form by his side came the fervently uttered words:

"God guide him!"

Behind now and then came the cheery voice of Captain Adams:

"Courage, men! Never fear, for night or day are alike to the king of the blizzard!"

"Are we lost?" was the question upon every lip, and soon it was announced by Buffalo Bill:

"The lights of the fort are in sight!"

Such a cry as came from despairing men suddenly given hope for life was never before uttered!

The lights of the fort were ahead, soon visible to every eye, and seen by the almost dying horses, too, they struggled on with renewed hope.

But Buffalo Bill had dashed on ahead, and loud rang his voice at the stockade gate:

"Ho, within there! Open quick, in the name of humanity!"

"I am Buffalo Bill!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S TRIUMPH.

The ringing voice of the scout without startled the sentinel upon the fort wall, where he was crouching in his sentry box, for orders had been given that the men should seek that shelter during the storm.

No fear whatever was felt from the redskins, for what human being could face such a tempest of cold, snow and wind?

The voice of the scout was recognized, though the sentinel, who had gone on post only two hours before, could scarce believe his ears, and he called lustily for the corporal of the guard.

The guard turned out with a rush, wondering at the call, and was greeted with the startling information:

"Buffalo Bill is calling loudly at the main entrance for admittance!"

The gates swung open just as the party rode up, and the voice of Captain Adams was heard:

"It is General Easton and escort, sergeant!"

"Ay, ay, sir, and God bless you all that you got here; but it's Buffalo Bill did it!" replied the sergeant.

"Yes, Buffalo Bill found us lost and guided us here, sergeant."

"No other man could have done it," called back Captain Adams, as he followed the scout and Surgeon Powell on toward headquarters.

Captain Adams dismissed his men, save those leading the pack animals with the general's baggage, with orders to get under shelter with all haste and report to the hospital.

Then he escorted the general and Miss Easton on to the quarters of Colonel Lennox, whither Buffalo Bill had rapidly ridden and announced their coming, so that there would be no delay.

"I will go on with you, Bill, to see if the general or that poor girl need my aid," said Surgeon Powell.

It was a surprise, indeed, to Colonel Lennox to welcome the general in such a blizzard, and he asked, vigorously:

"In God's name, how did you make it?"

"Through that noble fellow's aid, Buffalo Bill, whom Captain Adams justly calls the king of the blizzard," answered the general, and he turned to thank the scout, but he was gone.

"We owe much to you, also, Surgeon Powell," he said.

"I have remained, sir, to report by return, with Cody's, to Colonel Lennox, and to see if either yourself or Miss Easton need my aid."

"My dear Powell, you need aid as much as we do, so quickly go to your quarters, and see to it that Buffalo Bill is cared for, too."

"If either myself or daughter need medical aid, we will call in your assistant to thaw us out, only let him look after you and the men first, not forgetting you, Captain Adams, though you did really so enjoy the blizzard."

As Miss Easton had already been taken in charge by Mrs. Lennox, and the general was in good hands, Surgeon Powell and Captain Adams left for their quarters.

Their first duty, however, was to see that the men had been properly cared for, and it was found that Buffalo Bill had already gone on the rounds, and reported that about two-thirds of the soldiers were badly frostbitten, several of them dangerously so, while nearly all of the horses would be of little use after their game and desperate fight for life.

"I am cold, yes, clear to my bones, but a hot drink has already helped, and I'll soon be all right," said Buffalo Bill, as he sat in Surgeon Powell's comfortable quarters.

"Well, Bill, you are about the toughest pine knot I know, for I confess that I am about used up; but you rode on ahead, with the weight of twenty-four lives on your shoulders, one a young girl, and not to speak of your own, and never once flinched from the appalling ordeal."

"I dared not."

"There was too much at stake."

"But did you see what I did as we reached the trail?"

"You saw him, then?"

"Yes."

"I thought that you did; but I suppose you said nothing for the same reason that I did."

"Not to demoralize the men, or shock Miss Easton. Yes."

"My horse was almost upon him when I saw him lying in the snow."

"Not ten feet from him lay his horse, also dead."

"It was poor Bowles, of course?"

"Yes, he had found the trail, but too late, for his horse no doubt went down, and he could do nothing, so laid down to die."

"I'll go after the poor fellow's body to-morrow."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, if this storm keeps up, Bill, and I believe that it will."

"But the coyotes will eat him, and——"

"No coyote will move out of his den such weather as this."

"Send your scouts out if the storm breaks, for go yourself you shall not, as you seem to forget that you wish to go to Yellow Dust City as soon as you can get there, and you need rest, or the next thing will be William F. Cody dead in the snow."

"What? the king of the blizzard freeze to death, Frank?" asked Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"It might be; but, joking aside, you rest for a few days,

if you wish to go to Yellow Dust, for if you do not lay by I'll have the colonel order you not to leave the fort."

"I'll obey orders," was the smiling reply, and, folding his stormcoat about him, Buffalo Bill went over to his own quarters, and was welcomed by his company of scouts.

The joy at their chief's return was dampened when told that their comrade, Bowles, lay dead in the snow some ten miles from the fort.

Once warmed through, with a blazing fire on the broad hearth of his little cabin, Buffalo Bill turned in to keep the rest he so greatly needed and so well had earned.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MINERS' RECEPTION.

For days longer the bitter winds blew and hail and snow drove over the land, blocking all trails and keeping all indoors save those whom garrison duty forced to face the dread storm without, and the party sent to bring in Scout Bowles' body for burial.

General Easton and May were not much the worse for their appalling experience, and the former said that he would return to Yellow Dust the moment that it was possible for him to do so.

The scout was sent for by Colonel Lennox and questioned upon the possibilities of the ride, and said he was sure such a storm, so early in the season, would be followed by milder weather.

Arrangements were, therefore, made for the return, the scout suggesting that the start be made in the afternoon, and a night halt made at the stockade cabin, which the men could readily put in condition, for there were half a dozen rooms in the old fort.

The next night a halt would be made at Cave Canyon, where all would be again sheltered, and Miss Easton could be made comfortable.

This was the plan, and the start was made the day after the blizzard ceased.

"I may remain some little time, Frank, but if I need you I will find a way of getting you word," said Buffalo Bill.

Riding on more rapidly than the escort, which was again under the command of Captain Adams, Buffalo Bill took with him half a dozen soldiers, and when the party arrived at the stockade all was ready for them.

The next day Cave Canyon was made, with a long halt at noon, and a tent carried by a pack horse was pitched for Miss Easton, the general sharing a cavern with the men.

It was noon when, the day following, the party rode up to the Golden Arms, Buffalo Bill having again gone on ahead to have all in readiness for the distinguished visitors to the mining camp.

Colonel Camp was wild with excitement at the coming of Miss Easton, and did all in his power, as he said:

"To make her feel that she was really in her own home."

To the colonel's regret, however, and the delight of General Easton and his daughter, it had been decided to send a stage out that afternoon, a six-mule sled having been sent over the trail to break the way, where it was needed, and, returning, reported all clear.

May Easton was glad of the chance to get a look at

the wild life in a mining camp, and yet she was soon satisfied with her experience.

Like wildfire the news of her coming had spread, and as a young and pretty girl was a rare bird that seldom lighted in Yellow Dust City, every member in the camps, every hanger-on, and those of every other calling was most anxious to see her.

They "cleaned up," and in their best toilets were soon on the run for the Golden Arms, and request was made that Miss Easton would come out and just take a look at the boys, which really meant that they should have a peep at her.

May accepted with a smile, and made her appearance with her father and Captain Adams.

The shout that greeted her made her shrink, but she blushed deeply, and bowed to the compliment of one honest fellow, who cried:

"Yer is ther prettiest gal I ever seen."

A cheer of approval greeted this, and then the colonel came to announce dinner.

It was the best dinner ever served in the Golden Arms, and was well enjoyed.

Then the stage was announced, and preparations were made for the start, for thirty miles were to be made that afternoon, for a halt at night at a stocktender's cabin, where there was accommodation for travelers.

"I am glad you are to go on the box, Bob White," said Buffalo Bill, recognizing the driver who was to take the coach out as an old soldier and plainsman, and one who could handle the reins with any man of the Overland trail.

"And I wish you were going along, too, Bill, for I don't like some whispering I have heard among several of the bad ones in this camp, for it is thought the old general has money."

"Say nothing about it, Bob, and don't worry," was Buffalo Bill's reply, and; somehow, Bob White seemed perfectly satisfied with it.

Soon after the general and his daughter came out, good-bys were said, the father and daughter warmly pressing the scout's hand at parting, and at a signal from Colonel Camp, the landlord, Bob White mounted his box and the coach rolled away, drawn by a team of six fine horses.

CHAPTER X.

CHIN-CHIN JIM.

Buffalo Bill's eyes had been busy when he arrived in Yellow Dust City. He was trying to recall faces.

He did recall a number which he had seen before, and was sifting those he had met incidentally on former visits to Yellow Dust City from those he believed he had guided over a night trail through a storm when life was at stake.

The fact that no one had yet referred to that ride was a surprise to him, but he had something on his mind that worried him more.

It was what Bob White, the stage driver, had said to him.

"Captain Adams, you intend to remain here until tomorrow before starting back, I believe?" the scout remarked, as the coach drove up. "May I ask you to do me a favor, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Will you start now, saying you will go to Cave Canyon to-night?"

"Why, yes; yet I don't see the reason, for I am glad enough to get a night in camp here."

"True, sir; but the reason is that I believe a storm will set in before three days, and it would be well to be near the fort when it begins."

"I have no fear with you along, Cody."

"But I am not to return with you, sir."

"Ah!"

"Lem Todd will carry you back all right, sir, and I brought him along for that purpose."

"He is a good scout, Cody; but why do you remain?"

"I wish to do so on a little matter of business, captain, which I cannot explain now, sir."

"You know best, and I will, of course, leave this afternoon, especially as you do not go with us."

"Now to the other reason, sir."

"Ah, yes; there were two, you said."

"I don't exactly like several movements I have seen here, and I will follow the coach, for I deem it important."

"Then I should do so by all means."

"It would be useless, sir, for did you have with you men no move would be made against the coach."

"But you?"

"Will leave the camp with you, sir, on the Fort Trail, cut across with you, sir, and several men to the stage trail, when several miles out from here, and be ready to aid if aid is needed."

"Yes, that is all right."

"If an attack is made on the coach, sir, it will be within twenty miles of this camp, for men will not remain out at night this weather, and they would wish to get back or to some retreat they know of."

"By starting at once, sir, we can soon be on their trail, cutting across, as I said, from the Fort Trail, and the work done, I can guide you across to the Cave Canyon to-night."

"Cody, I am in your hands, so say what you wish, and I will give the orders."

"Then tell the colonel that, fearing bad weather, you have decided to start at once."

"I'll do it."

The colonel looked sad, indeed, when he learned the intention of Captain Adams, and when the bugler sounded the bugle to call the soldiers, all the men of the camp within hearing came on the jump.

The result was a crowd about the Golden Arms as large almost as had been there a short while before to see May Easton.

As most of them had gone off simply to "take something," they had not gotten very far away, for it was, as is always the case with men at a bar, a case of "repeat."

When the crowd learned that the soldiers were to return at once to the fort, fearing another storm, and that Buffalo Bill was to accompany them, there was considerable excitement, quick consultation, and then, as the cavalry came to the front, mounted for the march, one of the men, known as a rather hard citizen, but possessing oratorical powers, suddenly shouted for order.

Order was instantaneous, and every eye was upon "Chin-Chin Jim."

Now, Chin-Chin Jim was not a Chinese, by any means, as his name might indicate, but an out and out borderman.

His "jaw music" and "tongue wag," as it was expressed in Yellow Dust City, had given him his name.

When there was a speech to make, Chin-Chin Jim was called upon.

At burials he preached the sermon as eloquently over a dead desperado as over the best man in camp.

He possessed a sonorous, musical voice, and all liked to hear him talk.

In fact, in shooting scrapes, the cry was frequently heard:—

"Look out there! Don't hit Chin-Chin Jim by mistake!"

As Jim was generally around when there was a row, he spent much of his time in dodging bullets.

He sang well, accompanying himself on the guitar; played the violin, could bring tears to the eyes of his audience in preaching a funeral sermon, but those who thought that Chin-Chin Jim was not a devil at heart didn't know him.

He played poker to win, but never for big money; he drank liquor from love of it, but never got drunk, and when cornered, he had fought, shooting to kill.

Such was the man who had suddenly called the miners of Yellow Dust "to order."

CHAPTER XI.

BORDER ELOQUENCE.

"Order! Order!" shouted Chin-Chin Jim, although the crowd had become perfectly quiet at his first call.

But Jim wished to be sure that the attention of all was riveted upon him.

"Gentlemen, I has a few words to say, and a vote of thanks ter give ter one who is most deservin'."

The crowd looked at each other in wonder, as to where the lightning was going to strike.

"I wishes them gallant Boys in Blue, led by ther dash-ingist of capt'ins in ther army ter hear what I has ter say, fer ef it don't consarn them individual like, it do consarn one of the greatest of humans in whom they holds an interest."

Captain Adams could not give the order to march after this.

"It were ther intention of some of our beloved, called tergether on this mournful occasion—why, hang it, pards, I'm off ther trail onter a funeral sarmon—I means ter say thet it were ther intention of a number of more or less respected pilgrims of Yellow Dust City ter call a caucus fer ter-night in the colonel's game saloon, fer ter do honor to a man of whom we feels proud ter have in our midst, a man as stands big in this country and is known to the crowned heads far and wide in ther countries of Europe, Asia and Africa.

"But circumstances which we galoots can't allus control has broke in upon us, and our plans fer ter-night's jubilee hev faded as doth the flower that is bad hit by ther frosted breath of ther howlin' blizzard of ther Rockies.

"What has downed us in this ere particular is the fact that we can't hev all things ter please us.

"Man groweth up like a toad-stool and is cut down by a mule hoof—thar I go ag'in inter graveyard chin music.

"But, ter continue:

"As we can't have ther blow-out ter-night, with free whiskey and halleyujahs, I has been honered by them that wishes ter do ther duty, ter express in public ther feelings they has in private—hold on thar, Buffalo Bill, for I is gittin' onter your trail now.

"Ther fact is, pards, a few weeks ago a party of prospectors, thinking ter find more gold in ther up country than was being dug here in Yellow Dust, started out on a venture.

"But beware of ther glitter of gold, my pards!

"Ther gold war not; ther trail was lost; ther snows they descended and did beat upon them poor mortals, until they war almost froze.

"They did wilt as ther flower; ther food give out, and lo! and behold! they war like ther lost lambs of Israel, beset with death.

"Then, suddenly, like a beacon to ther mariner on ther seas, come a man on horseback inter ther camp.

"Thar he be, gents! He sitteth upon his horse before you all.

"It was Buffalo Bill!

"He did come to them poor lost coyotes of Israel; he did bid them to follow him, and he would lead them to ther Promised Land.

"Through darkness and despair, through wind and snow, never failing, he led them on.

"One fell by the wayside, a corpse.

"I preached his funeral discourse, you remember, and brought loving tears inter ther eyes of pilgrims, tears thet froze as they fell, fer it were dead cold, yer all remember.

"Another fell by ther wayside, and I buried him, too, but ther cold froze my eloquence.

"But on went Buffalo Bill, straight—no, it's a zigzag trail, but, poetically speaking, straight as the arrer flies to ther heart of a dove, until he reached the sheltering embrace of the Golden Arms.

"There the poor, frozen pilgrims found rest, warmth and shelter, but the hero who had saved them, waiting for no thanks, pushed on where duty called him.

"Now, pards, it is the pleasure of this meeting ter give ter Buffalo Bill a vote of thanks, and ter lay before him a golden offering, this bag of gold dust, which the men he saved wishes him to accept, ter do with as he will."

Yells that were deafening followed this specimen of Chin-Chin Jim's eloquence, hats were thrown into the air, revolvers fired, and the name of Buffalo Bill resounded from hundreds of lips.

The scout's face was pale, rather than flushed. His eyes burned brightly, but a stern look hovered about his mouth rather than one of deep gratitude for the vote of thanks and the gift of gold.

He took off his broad sombrero, however, and bowed to the crowd his thanks, then he rode up to where Chin-Chin Jim stood on the piazza, the bag of gold in his hand, and said:

"I thank you, pard, for the very complimentary allusions to myself, and through you those who have extended to me this valuable gift; but what I did was only duty to

fellow-men in distress, and in the lines of duties I am expected to render.

"The government pays me for my services, and I have never been guilty of taking pay for a human life, so I will not do so now, save to hand over to Colonel Camp, store-keeper Sule Ross and Mina Carl Camp this bag of gold, which they can devote to a fund to aid poor unfortunates who need it far more than I do."

He did not touch the bag, and the colonel, Sule Ross and Carl Waring, standing near, stepped forward at his call and took it in charge, amid the wild shouts of the crowd.

Again lifting his hat, Buffalo Bill drew his horse back to the head of the troop, and said in a low tone:

"I am ready, Captain Adams. We have already lost too much precious time."

"What a remarkable scene, Cody! This is a land of wonders," was the captain's answer, and he gave the order to march, and the troop went off at a trot that increased in speed as Yellow Dust City was left further behind.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE STAGE TRAIL.

Down the trail rode Buffalo Bill, guiding the trooper escort.

After several miles had been gone over he halted and said:

"Here is where we turn off, sir, for the winding of this trail southward and of the stage trail northward, brings them but three miles apart here, and there is a narrow canyon cutting through the range."

"We will take it, Cody. How many men do you wish?"

"Say half a dozen of the best mounted, sir, with twenty-four hours' of supplies and an extra horse."

The men were quickly selected, the supplies were put upon one of the pack horses, and, with the sergeant in command and Scout Lem Todd as guide, the escort was ordered to go on to Cave Canyon for the night.

Riding by the side of Buffalo Bill, the half-dozen troopers following, Captain Adams gave the order, and the push ahead was made through the narrow canyon.

Fortunately, the hard wind had almost swept it clear of snow, but in places there was a sharp, hard struggle for the horses.

The stage trail was reached, and after a close examination by the scout, he cried:

"They have gone by, sir."

"The coach?"

"Yes, sir; but those who followed it also."

"Then we must hasten."

"There are seven horses along, sir, as near as I can get hold of the tracks."

"None too many for us, for we are eight."

"Yes, sir, it will be easy work for us."

"Shall we follow?"

"Yes, sir; and we have things our own way, I think," and Buffalo Bill turned down the stage trail.

Half a dozen miles were gone over, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"The first relay station is not over two miles ahead, and this is fifteen miles from Yellow Dust.

"I do not believe the coach is a mile from here, and the attack will be made before it reaches the relay station—hark!"

All listened, and a shot was heard, not a quarter of a mile ahead on the trail.

"They are at it, sir," and Buffalo Bill spurred on, Captain Adams by his side, the men three abreast following.

* * * * *

The coach had meanwhile pulled along at a good gait. Bob White did not care to be in the night reaching the relay where the halt was to be made until the next morning.

After he had driven some distance an idea flashed through his mind to look behind him.

What he saw caused him to turn pale. Five men were coming at a gallop behind him. All were so muffled up that he could not see enough of any one of them to recognize him.

But he knew that the ordeal was upon him, so he called out to his passengers:

"General, five horsemen are coming after us, sir, and I don't believe they mean any good. It won't do to be reckless, but be guided by circumstances as to what we had best do."

The general felt a chill at his heart, such as he had never known in personal danger. It was apprehension for his beautiful daughter.

"I will be prepared to defend myself and my daughter, driver," he replied, and got his revolvers ready.

Another glance behind showed Bob White that the horsemen were coming up rapidly. Their horses seemed to have been hard ridden to catch up with the coach.

Nearer they came, showing no weapons, nor hailing him.

A bend of the trail put them out of sight, and Bob White was tempted to run for it, but he knew this would be useless in the rough condition of the trail.

A moment after the horsemen dashed around the bend, and as they came up one of them called out:

"We have had a hard ride of it, señor, to overtake you."

"What for?"

"The colonel sent us along as an escort."

CHAPTER XIII.

A GIRL'S PLUCK.

The general breathed more freely at their reply; but Bob White did not.

The general had his weapons ready, and the driver had his at hand.

The statement of the horseman seemed all right, but why should the colonel, who was stage agent, become anxious about such distinguished passengers in such cold weather, and send men to see that they arrived all right at the right halting-place?

"If you are all right, Bob, we'll go back and report," spoke the leader, adding:

"It's a bad night to be caught out in."

"Hold on, driver, a moment," called out the general.

Bob White drew rein, and felt that he had been wrong, after all.

"Return, my good fellows, and tell Landlord Camp that I appreciate his kindness and thank him.

"We are getting along all right, and as we descend the mountain will have less snow and cold.

"Here, warm yourselves with this when you return, for you will need it."

As he spoke the general extended his hand, containing a twenty-dollar gold piece, as a return for the kindness of the horsemen.

But the general's hand was grasped in a grip of steel by the man to whom he had generously extended the gift, and a revolver was shoved full in his face, while the words came threateningly:

"Move an inch and you are a dead man! Submit and you will not be harmed!"

The four horsemen had slipped to the ground on the off side of their horses, and their rifles were leveled across their saddles.

One rifle covered Bob White, the others were aimed at the body of the coach.

"Come, what is your will?" asked the general, taken by surprise.

"To hold your daughter a prisoner until you pay us big money for her ransom, for we know you've got it, general."

As the ruffian uttered the last word he dropped dead!

A bullet had crashed through his brain!

At that instant Buffalo Bill and Captain Charlie Adams dashed around the turn in the trail, a hundred feet away!

They were on foot, revolvers in hand, and at sight of them Bob White pulled trigger, dropping a third of the outlaws.

At that moment the six soldiers, whom their captain and the scout had distanced in the ride to the rescue, came at a gallop around the bend.

"Hands up, or you drop dead in your tracks," shouted Buffalo Bill, and the two men, seeing that they could not reach their horses, and knowing that it was death to attempt to fly on foot, raised their hands quickly.

"Ah, Cody, another debt of gratitude to owe you, my good friend.

"Why, do you know these wretches intended to kidnap my daughter?"

"They are capable of anything, sir."

"Ah, Captain Adams, you, too, are one of our rescuers!" The general had sprung out of the coach, and now warmly wrung the hands of the officer and the scout, while he expressed his thanks to the soldiers also.

"Your men have secured the prisoners, Captain Adams, and we had best not detain the coach, sir," said Buffalo Bill.

"You are right, and I am sure it will not be held up again, general."

"I have no further fear of it, captain.

"But you do not realize what you gentlemen have done for me and mine."

"I shall have to ask you, general," broke in Buffalo Bill, "to carry these three bodies on the top of the coach to the next relay station, where they will be buried by the stock-tenders."

"Certainly, Cody."

"But I desire a look at their faces first," and Buffalo Bill drew the mask and muffler from the face of the leader.

"Yes," was all he said.

The faces of the other two were then looked at, and of one the scout simply added:

"Another!"

At the third he shook his head in a dubious way, as he looked sharply at him.

"What about the prisoners, Bill?"

"We will take them, Bob, for they are wanted at the fort," was the reply.

The three dead outlaws were then put on the top of the coach and strapped there, when Buffalo Bill said, in a low tone, to Bob White:

"Your horses have had twenty minutes' rest, so rush them to the station with all speed. When you get there take the best team and push them hard for the night halt, for more bad weather is threatening, and I fear dark will catch you before you get there."

"It does look so, Pard Cody."

"I'll tell you what to do: There are two men at the next relay. Mount one of them on a fresh horse and send him flying through to your night halting-place to get a fresh team and bring them to meet you."

"If he hurries he can meet you eight miles or so from the station, and then you can put teams through for all they are worth."

"Right you are, pard scout, and I thank you for the suggestion. You always have your clever wits about you and know just what to do at the right time."

"It will get me there before night, for I can make each team fly."

"All ready!" and Bob White mounted his box.

Farewells were said, and off went the coach at a clipping pace, for Bob White knew well that it would never do for night to catch him on that snowbound trail.

"Now, captain, we must ride for it, and I'll push right on to Cave Canyon with you, as night will catch us before we get there," said Buffalo Bill.

The prisoners were already mounted, bound to their saddles, but carefully protected against the cold.

With the five horses of the outlaws and the extra animal brought along, each soldier had a horse to lead.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO PRISONERS.

An hour or so after dark they reached the canyon, and were greeted with a cheer.

A hot supper was ready for them, and the soldiers already there looked after the tired horses.

The prisoners were well treated also, but appeared to have little appetite for the good supper given them.

A fire was built in the mouth of the cave, and at the request of the scout Captain Adams ordered the two prisoners brought there for him to have a talk with.

They soon came, pale and anxious looking.

"Men, I wish to have a talk with you, and you might as well tell the truth, for I know more than you think I do, and will catch you in any lie you utter," said the scout.

"If you give us our lives we'll talk; not without."

"That's so," chimed in the other.

"I do not believe your information in that valuable."

"We knows a heap."

"So do I."

"Come, Buffalo Bill; trade what we knows for our lives."

"No. I'll get it without allowing two such villains as you are to escape the gallows."

This staggered the men, and they looked anxiously at each other, while the scout said:

"Your leader to-day was none other than the man who had such a flow of language in presenting me a vote of thanks."

"He's quit his chin music now," asserted one.

"Oh, yes, his name was Chin-Chin Jim. I've seen him before—just where I saw you before to-day."

"Whar was that?"

"You were both among the men I led through the storm."

The men were silent, and Buffalo Bill asked:

"Are you two, and were those three men who were killed, the only ones of the band I guided to Yellow Dust City who were outlaws?"

"Yes, we was all."

Buffalo Bill smiled, but asked:

"Where are the men who were on that prospecting tour?"

"Two died on ther trail thet night, yer remember, and two died soon after from exposure, while Old Rhubarb sawed the arm off of one and a leg off of another."

"Them three men you seen turn ther toes up ter-day, and here we two is."

Buffalo Bill said nothing, but in his mind he was working out a sum in arithmetic.

He was counting as follows:

"Two died on the trail, two more after arriving in camp, making four."

"Two lost a limb, so six are accounted for, and three were killed to-day, and they make nine, with these two prisoners, running the number up to eleven that are accounted for."

"Eleven from twenty-seven leave sixteen yet to account for, a rather quick thinning out of the band."

Then, turning to Captain Adams, the scout added:

"I know all I care to from these men, sir, so the sergeant can take them; but if you will ask Colonel Lennox to hold them for trial some little time, I can promise him more prisoners, or a least more testimony to condemn these two."

The storm did not materialize during the night, but when the day dawned the clouds hung low and were very threatening.

"Push for the stockade cabin, Captain Adams, with all haste, for the quarters there are good, should we be snowed in for a few days, and here you could not stand it, sir."

"You are right, Cody, and, without delaying for a noon halt, we should reach the stockade some hour or two before night."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish that you were going with us."

"I think I can be of more service just now, sir, in Yellow Dust City," was the reply.

"Well, take care of yourself, and I shall let the colonel know that you saved the general."

"With your aid, sir," and with a military salute to the captain Buffalo Bill saw him go on after his men, when he turned back on the trail to Yellow Dust City.

He rode slowly, for a terrible blizzard had come on.

Suddenly, through the storm, he beheld a horse and rider, both cowering under the shelter of a rock and in a retreat that from a less severe storm might be fairly safe, but in the tempest was poor, indeed.

"Ho, pard, have you halted there to die—by Jove! it is an Indian!" and Buffalo Bill dropped his hand to bring his rifle around for use.

But the redskin did not move, nor his pony, either.

Instantly the scout was by his side, his hand upon his shoulder.

The red rider made an effort to raise his hands, but could not, then stared vacantly at the scout.

"Freezing to death, as I live!"

Out came the scout's flask of liquor and a generous draught was forced down the red throat.

The Indian wore the full togs and war bonnet of a chief of high rank, and was yet a comparatively young man.

He seemed to feel, when the drink was forced into his mouth, that he had found a friend, but he could mutter but a word or two.

Buffalo Bill fairly lifted the redskin out of the saddle and placed him where he could feel the warmth, gave him another drink, and then unrolled his bed blankets and put them about him.

Taking from his traps his coffee pot and provisions, he soon had some water boiling and some venison broiling over a fire he kindled.

The Indian pony and his own horse were led up near to the fire, the scout knowing that it would keep the chill off.

Turning to the Indian again, he found him much improved by the liquor and the warmth.

The chief drank the coffee and devoured the venison and crackers offered in a way that showed he was most starved.

The scout watched him attentively, and when he felt that he was warmed clear through, he made him stand up by the fire, while he wrapped his blankets about him.

Leading the pony nearer, he aided him to mount, and then tucked the blankets all over his legs and feet, muffled up his head, and, mounting his own horse, led the way out of the temporary shelter which had been such a boon to the poor redskin, for nowhere else could a fire have been built for miles, and so good a retreat found.

On through the storm Buffalo Bill rode, the Indian pony following in the broken tracks made by the large horse, and his rider watching the muffled form ahead with strange wonder in his eyes.

The delay to save the redskin, and the heavy traveling through the storm, made it slow work, and night fell before the first cabin of Yellow Dust came in sight.

But on pushed the scout, and a light from a cabin soon glimmered ahead. Then more lights came into view, the larger ones of the Golden Arms. The chief followed in silence wherever his rescuer cared to lead.

A few minutes more, and, riding up to a cabin, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Ho, Sule Ross, come out here, for there are two half-frozen men to care for."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEATH HAND.

Sule Ross heard the cry without, threw on his storm coat, and sprang to the door.

"Quick, Sule, for my companion is in a bad way, I fear. He was half dead when I found him," cried Buffalo Bill.

The storekeeper had been looking at the muffled forms, and now at Buffalo Bill's request he lifted the Indian in his strong arms and went with him into the cabin, the scout meanwhile riding on to the log stable near at hand to get the horses under shelter as quickly as he could.

Once in the cabin, Sule Ross laid the blanketed form on the floor, then put on the kettle to boil, got out a bottle of liquor and glasses, and prepared a bed on the floor not far from the fire, placing there a bear robe and blankets.

He then drew the blankets off the form, which was seated bolt upright, and cried in amazement:

"By Heaven! it is an Indian!"

The redskin was in a semi-stupor. He seemed not to have the power of movement, and his eyes were listless in their expression.

Sule Ross forced into his lips a drink of liquor, then placed him upon the bear-robe bed, enveloped him in hot blankets, and was bustling about making coffee when Buffalo Bill, looking more like a grizzly bear than a human being, entered the cabin.

For a while it was a struggle for life, but at last the devoted care of the two men was successful, and the Indian rallied, and once on the mend, began to rapidly improve.

The drinks, warmth of the room, and care of Buffalo Bill and Sule Ross had saved him.

He gazed about him vacantly at first, then seemed to realize his position, and, seeing the scout, said in a husky voice:

"Good white brother to Death Hand."

The two white men gave a glance at each other.

Death Hand! one of the most powerful of the mountain chiefs, and the bitter foe of the whites, one who was greatly feared along the whole border, especially at Yellow Dust City!

His eyes turning upon Sule Ross, he said:

"Two good white brothers. Two time save Death Hand from happy hunting grounds. Red man don't forget friend or foe."

"You were in a bad way, chief, but you will be all right after a night's rest. Don't fear trouble, for you are not to be disturbed by any one. We will have some supper now."

The supper served the better to pull the chief together, and Sule Ross gave him a pipe to smoke after it.

Then a bed was made for him in the back room, which Ross used as a kitchen, and where there was a good fire, and he was soon fast asleep in the very heart of the settlement he had more than once raided with disastrous effect.

"Do you think it can be the Chief Death Hand, Bill?" asked Sule Ross, when the two were seated, talking together and enjoying their pipes.

"Oh, yes, his war bonnet is that of a great chief, and then I recognized him as soon as I got a good look at his face, for that scar across his forehead my bullet gave him a year ago in the old stockade cabin fight."

"Where did you find him?"

Buffalo Bill told the story.

"Well, Pard Bill, I hardly know what to say about you," said Sule Ross, as the two friends continued to sit before the fire, listening to the howling storm, and Buffalo Bill had just told about his having come to Yellow Dust City to unearth a band of outlaws.

Buffalo Bill laughed, puffed slowly at his pipe, and then replied:

"Sule, you remember I told you, when I brought that outfit in; that I had a secret to tell you? Well, I am going to tell you now."

"I am all ears."

"Who are the officers of the vigilantes of this place?"

"Sunflower Sam is captain."

"A good one, from what I have heard of him."

"The colonel is next in rank; then I come, and Waring is fourth."

"An ably officered command, I should say, only your army experience should have made you leader."

"I prefer the position I have, on account of my business, while the Shasta Sport can attend to the duties in the field, having only his gambling to occupy his time."

"The people do not know just who are the vigilantes?"

"No, other than that we four, as officers, have had our say."

"You were the ones who sentenced the Blue Belts to exile?"

"Yes; for they were a hard lot."

"Now, tell what you know about the members of that prospecting trail which I led back here."

"Very little more than that a party of some thirty went out, got lost, became scant of food, and were snowed in, and but for you would all have died."

"Do you know who they all were?"

"No; for they have had little to say about their venture."

"I am here to know each one who was on that prospecting trail, Sule."

"I'll do what I can to help you."

"Now tell me, Sule, what about those Blue Belts you drove out of the camps?"

"Bill, do you know I have worried about them, for the storms coming on so much earlier this year must have got them in the mountains, and perhaps they perished."

"I did not want that, of course, and I have been inclined to hire some men and send them out with supplies to look them up, for the aim of the Secret Vigilantes was to be just, not cruel."

"Well, Sule, you made a sad mistake in sending those men off, as I will tell you," said Buffalo Bill, impressively, and his look and tone made Sule Ross feel uncomfortable.

"You have seen them, Cody?" he asked.

"They left here fifteen strong. They now are but seven; eight are dead."

"My God! How can that be?"

"From cold, exposure and wounds."

"Then they were in a fight?"

"No, they were tracked by a band of men, told treacherously that they had been found not guilty, after all, and could return to Yellow Dust, and then they were made prisoners."

"But by whom?"

"The party of twenty-seven alleged prospectors that left Yellow Dust City."

"Can it be possible?"

"They were followed by those men, as I have said, betrayed, and then did they suffer what few men could and live to tell the story."

"What was done to them?"

"The hand or foot of each one was cut off."

"Great God!" and Sule Ross sprang to his feet and began to excitedly pace the floor.

"Buffalo Bill, did any other man than you tell me this I would call him a most heartless liar. Can it be possible that this monstrous crime was done?"

"Worse still, Ross."

"In the name of high Heaven, what could be worse?"

"They were robbed, left only with scant clothing and food, and told to go their way to certain death, but to suffer the torture of the damned before they died."

"I tell you, Sule Ross, it was the most revolting cruelty I every heard of, even among Indians, and when I found those poor wretches and saw their sufferings, I took up the gantlet for them, and I tell you now that I shall put them in the way of avenging their wrongs. Yes, and shall aid them in the just work, for those who wronged them shall suffer full punishment for their awful crime. I swear it!

"I am their ally, so is Surgeon Frank Powell. We are pards in this campaign of vengeance."

"And I also am with you, Pard Cody, and I swear to enter into the work with you, heart, body and soul!" and Sule Ross brought his fist down upon the table with savage earnestness, fire flashing from his eyes.

"And who were the self-appointed executioners, Ross?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"They were the prospecting party."

"Sure."

"I can account for eleven of them."

"Yes."

"Leaving sixteen to be ferreted out."

"We can and must find those sixteen."

"Yes, we must, but who was their leader?"

"Those two prisoners told me that Chin-Chin Jim was."

"He was a clever fellow, deep as a well, sly as a fox and a bad one."

"But he was not the leader."

"You know this?"

"I did not see their faces very well, for they kept them muffled, even when eating their supper, but Chin-Chin Jim had not the voice of the leader of the expedition."

"You ought to know; but could not the Blue Belts help you spot them by what they saw?"

"Their torturers were all masked, you remember."

"Yes, yes. They, therefore could be of little help; so now we must do it all here. I believe we can spot each one, Bill; in fact, I know we can."

"It must be done quietly, not to let them think they are suspected."

"Yes, or they'll raise sheol in the camp to cover up their devilment."

"We must spot them one by one."

"I will fix upon a man I suspect, let you know, and you can verify as best you can if he is one of the gang."

"I will do that. We must find them out, one by one, and when we know them I shall act. I shall give out that I am here awaiting dispatches which General Easton is to send back. That will account for my being here, and I will remain here with you."

"All right. During the day many men come to my store, about half the camps, on one errand or another, and you can loaf in there and see them all."

"Then you can drop in at the Golden Arms and have a look at the faces, and at night we will go to the Colonel's Game, and there you will have the whole outfit."

"Very true."

"Now tell me if you know of a good surgeon in the camps?"

"Old Rhubarb."

"Has he been away?"

"Not a day."

"He is not the man, for those of the Blue Belts were amputated by an expert."

"I know of no other."

"We'll find him, never fear."

"Now let us turn in, for I've done a good day's work."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATAL WAR-TRAIL.

The morning broke with the storm still raging, but Buffalo Bill was willing to rest indoors after his late adventures and hardships.

His anxiety about Captain Adams and his soldiers was considerable, and yet he felt that Lem Todd had been able to guide the command to the stockade cabin, and if so, they were safe, though snow-bound, while the officer was too thorough a soldier to risk leaving there without cause for it.

At the fort he knew that the anxiety for the general and all would be great, but the return of the captain would allay those fears.

The Indian chief still felt what he had gone through with the day before, for he made no effort to leave his bed until Buffalo Bill called him to breakfast.

When he had smoked a while, Buffalo Bill asked the chief how he felt.

The Death Hand replied that he felt fairly well, and could go away on his pony if the scout wished.

The scout said that he would see the Death Hand well on his trail, that no paleface with a black heart should kill him from behind a rock.

The chief seemed deeply moved and much pleased by the scout's words, and was evidently pondering some momentous reply in his mind, for he said several times that he would talk later.

Then Buffalo Bill went on to say that the palefaces were bitter toward him, because he was their foe, and some of them might try to show their anger; but he was

to remain in the cabin until he felt well, and then keep close by him until he was ready to go.

There was no fear in the brave chief's face as he replied:

"Me stay with great white chief, but Death Hand no afraid to die."

"I can well believe that; but, why was it the great chief was alone and so far from his people?"

"Death Hand did not come alone."

"Are any of your young men about?"

"All dead."

"Dead!"

"In snow."

"Where are they?"

"Long way."

"How many of them?"

The chief held up both hands three times.

"Thirty! This is terrible," cried Buffalo Bill, and by close questioning he got out of the chief that he had started with thirty of his braves to see if he could not, later, make a raid upon Yellow Dust City with a large force.

They had been caught in the storm, had found what shelter they could, but when it was over they were in a terrible plight, frost-bitten and some of them dying.

Their provisions became scarce, and when the second storm came, his young men had died like wild flowers under the chilling winds.

In vain did he try to save them, for, strange to say, he had not been frost-bitten, and remained strong.

It showed him that the Great Spirit had frowned upon his intended war upon the palefaces, by killing his young men, and saving him to go back and tell his people.

When he was left alone he had killed the ponies that remained, and driven, to save his own life, to leave his young men, he had started, become bewildered, wandered about, and had the scout not found him he, too, would have died.

Buffalo Bill listened to the plaintive story, and then said:

"Your young men shall not remain to be food for the coyotes. I will get volunteers to-night to go with me, and to-morrow we will start for the place and bury the braves where they fell."

The expression that came over the stern, stolid face of the Indian chief at Buffalo Bill's promise to keep the coyotes from feeding upon his young men told plainly that the inmost soul of the red man was touched.

He could appreciate fully that the man, for whose scalp he had so longed, the great scout who had been the dread of his bravest warriors, was his friend, if only he allowed him to be.

He did not speak, he simply arose, took the scout's hand in both of his own, and pressed it hard.

Soon after he said that he would guide the scout to the bodies, that they were about two hours' pony ride from Yellow Dust City, showing that they had gotten dangerously near the camps in their scouting trail.

A good dinner and the fact that he no longer felt dread of Buffalo Bill, caused the chief to recuperate rapidly, and looking out at the weather, he said, with the air of a weather prophet:

"Storm go soon; bright up there when dark comes."

This showed that his idea was that the stars would be visible.

"Yes, and it will be as cold as Greenland," said Sule Ross, who added, quickly:

"Here comes a gang of men."

He opened the door for them and invited them in.

There were five of them, and had come for him to open the store and sell them some buffalo robes and blankets.

They eyed the Indian curiously, asked Buffalo Bill what brought him back, and followed Sule Ross into the store to make their purchases.

He let them out the store door, and returned in half an hour, to report that the presence of Death Hand would be all over the camps by night.

"They seem to think we are hiding him here, and when I told them who he was, boldly said that they would let the people know.

"I told them then that you intended to bring him up to the colonel's at night, and ask for men to go with you to-morrow to bury his dead braves."

"That was the very thing to tell them, Sule, and I will take him up with me to-night."

"I'll be there, and I hope there will not be trouble."

"So do I," was the quiet reply, and then, glancing out of the window, Buffalo Bill continued:

"The storm is over, Sule."

After a good supper the Indian chief expressed perfect willingness to go with the scout, Sule Ross having opened his store for sales, but promised to be on hand at the Colonel's Game.

He gave Buffalo Bill a hint that men in the store had talked angrily about Death Hand being in camp, and the scout replied:

"I shall take the bull by the horns at the outset and stand no nonsense, Sule."

"I know that, and it is best; but, look out for a fellow known as Scalplock Sam, for he is a bad one, and he has four equally as bad backers."

"I'll keep an eye on Scalplock, Sule," was the reply.

Soon after, with the Indian decorated in his war bonnet, Buffalo Bill started through the snow to the Golden Arms.

The colonel met him most cordially, asked why he had not come to the Golden Arms as his guest, and then listened with intense surprise to his report of the attack on the coach by Chin-Chin Jim and four comrades.

"We missed him, yet supposed he was snowed in at some of the cabins. But you astound me, Mr. Cody, at what you tell me, for I did not regard him as a road agent. The Secret Vigilantes must look sharp.

"Why, this will give Yellow Dust City a bad black eye, to have a general of the army attacked, and with his daughter, too. It is too bad, too bad, and it shall be made known in the Game to-night."

"Yes, it should be, for, as you say, the Secret Vigilantes will have to look sharp, for there are still a few bad men left in Yellow Dust, after getting rid of the Blue Belts."

"So there are, and, do you know, I am getting anxious about those Blue Belts, in this awful weather, for we did not wish to kill them, Mr. Cody."

"You may be well anxious, colonel, in such weather for any one exposed to it."

"I am, I am. But, about that Indian?"

"Well?"

"What about his being the Chief Death Hand?"

"He is Death Hand."

"The boys will wish to kill him."

"If you have any influence with them you had best advise them that they better not, that he is in the keeping of a government officer, who is fully capable of taking care of him."

"I will, I will. But, he is a bad one, very bad one, Mr. Cody."

"I am not defending his morals, or his right to kill palefaces; but he is an Indian, one whom I found nearly dead, and I brought him to Yellow Dust."

"Better not take him into the Game, Mr. Cody."

"It is just where I shall take him, for I intend to go there to call for volunteers to go with me to bury his dead braves.

"I am not trying to hide the Indian, Colonel Camp, from a lot of cowards who feared to fight him openly, but now would be glad to kill him, that he is in their power."

"You have got nerve, Mr. Cody, and that wins. I am, of course, your backer in case of trouble, and so will others be."

"Thanks. I hope that there will be no trouble, but if it comes I will meet it as best I can," and, turning to Death Hand, who had stood as motionless as a bronze statue, Buffalo Bill spoke to him in his own tongue, and the two started for the Colonel's Game saloon.

But, though his face was immovable, Death Hand had understood enough of what was said to fully comprehend his position, and the scout's.

CHAPTER XVII.

• AN EXCITING SCENE.

The storm being over, the colonel's saloon was pretty well crowded.

Men living at a distance had been storm-bound, and were glad to get up to the stores to buy something, and to the saloons to "take something." Gamblers were also in full sway.

Buffalo Bill entered in his quiet way, the Indian following; and following the Indian came the colonel, for he was determined to be on hand if wanted.

Carl Waring was there, also, and Sule Ross had gone direct to the saloon from his store, leaving his partner in charge there.

There, too, was the Man-from-Shasta, engaged in a game with several others for big stakes.

Scalplock Sam likewise was there, and looking his best.

He had been making ugly remarks about the Indian being in town, and what should be done with him.

His four comrades were keeping close to him, too, as though told to be on hand if wanted.

There were honest miners and bad ones, toughs and still worse than toughs, all in the saloon.

Fully three hundred men were gathered there, and a

loud hum of voices was heard by the scout before he reached the door.

As he entered the door a voice said:

"Thar he is now!"

A dead silence followed.

"And ther Injun is with him," added another voice.

Every eye was turned upon Buffalo Bill first, then upon the Indian.

The scout paused to look around for a seat.

"Here, Mr. Cody, join me."

It was the colonel, and Buffalo Bill turned and took the seat at Colonel Camp's table.

The Indian also sat down, as Buffalo Bill gave him a chair.

Glancing about, Buffalo Bill nodded to several familiar faces, and the look showed him Sule Ross, Waring and others whom he felt belonged to the best of the citizens.

Scalplock Sam arose and started toward the scout, but Colonel Camp called out:

"Gentlemen, I have something to say."

All was attention. Of course, he was going to explain the presence of the Indian chief there.

"I am sorry to say that the blow we visited upon the Blue Belts, in driving the band from our midst, was not enough to give others a warning to keep them from crime, for a monstrous wrong has been done almost at our very doors."

Every eye was upon the colonel. He was always glad to make a speech, and improved every opportunity to do so.

"I wish to tell you that this gentleman, whom you all know as Buffalo Bill, and whom you are aware is the king of bordermen, and who was so honored yesterday by the present of a bag of gold, presented by those whose lives he had saved—this great scout, I say, who gave that gold to those in need, arrived last night in the driving blizzard, to report to me that five road agents from this camp had held up Bob White's stage to rob General Easton and his beautiful daughter.

"But, gentlemen, that dashing officer, Captain Adams, anxious for the safety of his general, took the trail of the coach, Buffalo Bill guiding, and arrived in time to kill three of the road robbers and capture the other two.

"Who four of those men were, Mr. Cody does not know, but the leader was none other than Chin-Chin Jim."

A roar of surprise went up at this, and a voice called out:

"Was he killed?"

"He was, and this great scout was sent back to report to me, as agent of the stage line, and to await here return dispatches from the general, and gladly we welcome him into our midst, and we trust while he is here he will be able to report how the citizens of Yellow Dust deal with road agents and outlaws, for the Secret Vigilantes must set to work to clear the atmosphere of crime once more.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention, and it will be soon known who those other four road agents were, for we can spot them."

This speech of the colonel's created the wildest excitement. Men talked loud and wildly, and it could be seen that many guesses were being made as to who were the other four men.

Suddenly a voice cried for order.

It was Scalplock Sam, and a silence at once followed, for all saw that the man had "blood in his eye."

Scalplock looked wicked. He had worked himself up to fever heat about the Indian chief being in Yellow Dust. He had strengthened his intentions by several very stiff drinks, and so was ready to make a greater name or mar the one he had, if that were possible.

His eyes were upon Buffalo Bill, though he addressed the assemblage.

"Gents, I has a word to say," he fairly roared.

"Out with it, then, Sam," said the colonel, who was by courtesy master of ceremonies in the saloon.

"That gent yonder, whom we all know is the king of scouts"—Scalplock did not wish to belittle a man he intended to master—"nobody daring to dispute me—I say that gent has a perfect right to protect stage coaches, shoot road agents, and all that, but he has no right ter insult ther citizens of this camp ther way he has."

All eyes turned upon Buffalo Bill, who asked quietly, without rising from his seat:

"In what way have I insulted the citizens of Yellow Dust?"

"You have brought inter our midst a Injun chief, ther foe of ther homes and firesides of Yellow Dust, ther skulking redskin thet has kilt our comrades, burned our cabins, run off our stock, and——"

"Without wishing to break in upon your very eloquent speech, Scalplock Sam, I will admit all you say to save argument; he is an Indian and fights in an Indian way. He is here. I brought him here, and what are you going to do about it?"

For a moment Scalplock was staggered, but he rallied quickly and cried:

"That man has scalped hundreds of our people!"

It was an unfortunate remark, for pat came Buffalo Bill's reply:

"And you, a white man, wear at your belt the scalplocks of the men you claim to have killed. You also appear to be in the scalping business."

A yell greeted this sally, and for an instant the tough was taken aback.

But he came to the attack again with:

"I am a white man, and as such I objects ter you bringin' thet redskin inter this camp."

"I found him in almost a dying condition by the side of the trail. He was so far gone that he could not resist me, as he otherwise would have done. I built a fire, gave him some liquor, wrapped him up, and brought him here, when Sule Ross and I again had a struggle to save his life.

"But, we did so, and I find that he is Death Hand, the great chief of the mountain tribes. He was out with a party of thirty braves on a scout, got caught in the blizzard, and every one but himself perished.

"I came here to-night to ask for a dozen brave men to go with me to bury those dead.

"Treat this chief right; bury those dead braves of his; send him back to his people our friend, and you will have saved many lives a year hence.

"That is my explanation, and I make it to the gentlemen present."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TOO QUICK FOR HIM.

The men in the saloon had been watchful, yet quiet. All knew that Buffalo Bill had right on his side.

But the troublesome element wanted excitement, so they nagged Scalplock Sam on.

Encouraged by the whispers about him, he said:

"I don't want no trouble with a government officer, though yer being Buffalo Bill has no terrors fer me; but I tells yer now that I intends ter hang thet Injun this night."

This was an avowed challenge. How would Buffalo Bill take it?

His reply was in the same unmoved tones in which he had before spoken:

"Here he is; come and take him; only don't forget that I shall try to protect him."

"That means that it's between you and me."

"As you please."

"I'll clip the Injun fust and then attend to you."

"As you please."

Scalplock drew his revolver.

To the surprise of those about him, when Buffalo Bill rose from his seat he already had his weapon in his hand.

As the scout rose Death Hand did the same. Calm, wholly unaffected by his surroundings, the Indian chief faced his foe. He held no weapon, showed none.

The crowd could but admire his splendid nerve.

"Does you intend ter shoot me if I pulls trigger on thet redskin?" demanded Scalplock.

"No."

"I thought yer dasn't."

"I intend to kill you if you make a move to fire at him."

Scalplock was a little nonplused at this.

The scout had his revolver in better position to use it quickly than had the camp terror.

So the rough said:

"Then it seems I must down you fust, thet redskin afterward."

"As you please. It is a matter of indifference to either the chief or myself which dies first."

The crowd laughed, and Scalplock was but the more disconcerted.

The colonel, Sule Ross, and Carl Waring were watching the situation with painful interest. The colonel was fearful that the scout might be killed in his saloon, and he dreaded the result. Yet he dared not interfere in the quarrel where but two men faced each other.

Carl Waring was anxious to see Scalplock Sam killed, and he cherished the idea that the scout was the man to do it.

Sule Ross was more nervous than had he been in Buffalo Bill's shoes. He loved the scout as a brother, and he knew that Scalplock was a very dangerous foe.

Still, the storekeeper had confidence in Buffalo Bill's ability to take care of himself. He knew by the calmness of the scout that he was in a dangerous humor, though he never would shoot to kill a man unless driven to it.

The Shasta Sport, from his point of vantage, was watching affairs like a lynx. He would be on hand when needed, all who knew him were certain.

But he, too, would not interfere where it was man against man.

"Does yer dare face me square, man ter man?"

"We are facing each other now."

"Answer my question, for I don't want nobody innocent hurt."

"Oh, I won't hurt any one; I'll send my bullet right where I aim it."

"Will yer face me at the drop of a hat?"

"I see no reason to do so. I want no trouble. You say you will kill this chief and I say you will not. That is all there is to it."

"Then I——"

With the words Scalplock threw his revolver forward.

Some said his aim was at the Indian; some said it was at Buffalo Bill.

No one but himself really knew, except Buffalo Bill.

Quick as he was, and trying to catch the scout off his guard, the terror did not get his revolver to a level before there came a report.

It was from the scout's revolver.

It had been aimed sure.

The bullet took the desperado between the eyes.

There was a wild war-whoop that nearly raised the roof.

It brought every man to his feet.

But, it was only Death Hand expressing his admiration.

Instantly he relaxed into his former immovable calm.

Scalplock Sam fell backward into the arms of his four comrades, rewarding one for his faithfulness by sending a bullet into his heart, for the nervous death-clutch on the trigger fired the weapon as it fell from his hand.

The other three were horrified, but they dropped the two bodies and turned to face the crowd, to take a hand in the trouble to avenge their leader and comrade.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE BURIAL.

The three companions of the dead desperado turned to face Buffalo Bill, to see that he was ready for them.

They saw, too, that the crowd, rejoicing in the death of the terror, would stand no nonsense from them.

They could have counted their backers a moment before by dozens; but now there had been a surprising change, and not a half dozen nodded encouragement to them.

"Come, no more of this."

"Put up your guns, or I'll take a hand!"

It was the Man-from-Shasta who spoke.

The toughs thought it best to obey, though one of them remarked:

"He kilt our pard, sport, and poor Sam, in his death-agony, kilt his best friend."

"Say no more, or there'll be more sudden deaths in the same outfit," assumed Sunflower, and seeing that the temper of the crowd was dangerous the three began to look after their dead comrades.

Buffalo Bill had resumed his seat, the Indian chief following his example.

Sule Ross had pressed forward and said:

"In your usual style, Cody."

"He brought it upon himself, Sule."

"He did. You were very patient with him."

"There'll be no more trouble, I hope."

"Not a bit."

Carl Waring came up and said:

"You deserve the name you bear as a dead shot, Mr. Cody. It was square between the eyes."

"Two birds with one shot, say I, as Sam killed his pard in falling. You are the quickest hand I ever saw with a weapon, sir," added the colonel, while the Shasta Sport came up and said:

"I wish to make your better acquaintance, sir, and to say that you have done Yellow Dust City a great service, for that man was one of the worst characters in the mines."

"I would rather have left him to the Secret Vigilantes, sir, to care for; but he was as determined to kill the chief here as I am determined to protect him."

"You did right, sir, and there shall be no more trouble about the Indian."

"But, what nerve he displayed, for he must have known the trouble was about him."

"He speaks English, sir," and he turned to Death Hand, whose eyes were fixed wistfully upon the scalps of Scalplock Sam and his comrade, who were just then being borne out of the cabin, passing within a few feet of him.

"By Jove, he's longing for their scalplocks!"

"I only wish he had them," laughed the colonel, who continued:

"Sunflower Sam, Mr. Cody, will go with you to bury those braves, and will make up a party for you."

"I thank you, sir, exceedingly. It will have a good effect on the chief, and that means his people, also."

"It will, indeed. How many will you wish?"

"A dozen, for the chief and I will go, also."

"I will have them ready at dawn, with a pack horse carrying picks and shovels," was the sport's answer.

This duty accomplished, and having shown his intention and ability to protect the chief, Buffalo Bill turned to leave the saloon, calling upon the crowd to drink at his expense.

The feeling was unanimous to do so.

The comrades of Scalplock Sam heard the invitation as they reached the door, and returned with great alacrity to also accept the scout's hospitality!

They wished to show that they had no "hard feelings" toward a man who could use a revolver as did Buffalo Bill, and had only done his duty.

"No hard feelings, pard," they said, as they raised their glasses, dashed off enough for their two dead comrades, as well as themselves, and then continued on in their mournful duty of carrying the bodies to their cabin.

Sule Ross accompanied Buffalo Bill and the chief from the saloon, and when they were safe in the cosy cabin of the storekeeper, Death Hand turned, grasped the hand of the scout, and said:

"Heap quick shoot! heap dead shoot! Great white chief mighty man—brother of Death Hand!"

Buffalo Bill and the chief were ready the next morning when the Shasta Sport and a dozen followers rode up

to the cabin, leading a pack horse with food, kindling wood, picks and shovels.

It was bitter cold but clear, and Death Hand rode to the front as guide, Buffalo Bill and the sport riding side by side.

The ride was about two hours, and the bodies were found, thirty in number, the coyotes just beginning to gather for a feast, having lost too much time, as is their custom, whining over it, and so losing their meal.

A spot was selected, a large, round grave dug, the bodies placed in it, in a sitting posture, facing each other.

Their weapons, and equipments taken from their dead ponies, were placed in the grave with them, a fire was built in the center, to warm them on the trail to the happy hunting grounds, Buffalo Bill arranging all as he knew was the Indian custom, for the chief would not ask it.

That he appreciated it could be seen.

Then the grave was filled in, and stones were brought and piled in cave shape upon it.

This done, dinner was eaten, and the trail taken back to Yellow Dust City.

Back to the cabin of Sule Ross went Buffalo Bill and the chief, and when the storekeeper came in, later, to supper, the scout said:

"Well, Sule, I have spotted ten of the band that followed the Blue Belts!"

CHAPTER XX.

SPOTTED.

Before retiring that night of the return from the funeral, Buffalo Bill asked Death Hand how he felt about returning to his people.

He knew that the Indian was anxious to go, and, what was more, he intended to accompany him quite a distance upon his trail.

The chief's face showed his pleasure at being able to return. He was wholly well, and could go back and show his people that he still lived. He would have to tell them how his braves had perished, but that would add new lustre to his fame, that he should escape.

In truth, he had much, very much, to tell his people. He had met the man he had regarded as his worst foe, and found him to be his best friend. He had been treated as a brother by the palefaces. All this he could say upon his return.

Having decided to start, Buffalo Bill said:

"You see, Sule, I still believe that there are men here who mean mischief to the chief."

"So do I."

"They would not do it openly, but they would kill him if they got a chance."

"I am sure of it."

"If he attempted to leave the camp alone he would be shot, and no one would know who did the deed."

"That is so."

"Now, I will go on with him to where he strikes up into the mountains, and he can get along all right from there, while it will not be bad going for me to go where my crippled crew are encamped."

"I see."

"I will carry them some more supplies from your

store, and I will tell them that I have discovered ten of their foes—in fact, can account for eleven, and know where to put my hand upon ten more.”

“You are sure of these ten men?”

“Yes, sure.”

“It was quick work.”

“I keep my eyes open, Sule, and have spotted these men, beyond a doubt!”

“And I can spot the other six.”

“You must do more, Sule.”

“How?”

“You don’t know the men I have spotted?”

“No.”

“Then spot the sixteen, so there can be no mistake.”

“Yes, in one way and another I can find them out, never fear, each and all of them.”

“Do so. Jot down their names and have them so you can point them out to me at a moment’s notice.”

“You see I take more supplies to my crippled crew now, because I do not wish to make another midwinter trip up there. I desire to give them all they need, and when the spring comes, and I am sure it will break early, as it began so long ahead of time, I will go from the fort with Surgeon Powell, carry horses for the outfit, and come here.”

“To Yellow Dust?”

“Yes.”

“You and Surgeon Powell?”

“All of us.”

“Not the crippled outfit, also?”

“Yes, all.”

“Bill, you will be taking big chances.”

“I think not. I shall arrive by night, come direct to you here, keep the Blue Belts hidden, and you can show the doctor and myself each man you have spotted.”

“I see.”

“I will compare notes, get the people together, and denounce the outrage, demanding the surrender of the guilty, or there will be quick work with revolvers, and no one to surrender.”

“Go ahead your own way, Cody, for you don’t often go wrong.”

“That is my present plan, Sule. I may change it afterward. Now, I’ll tell you what I want for the Blue Belts, and you can fit the chief out with a couple of pack horses and change it to me.”

“The camps will pay for it, not you,” was the reply, and Sule Ross put down the list as Buffalo Bill called it off.

He gave to the chief a rifle and pair of revolvers, clothes, blankets, and provisions in plenty to last him and his family a long time, with pipes and tobacco, a fine saddle and bridle for his own use, and all else that would please the Indian’s fancy.

The two pack horses were well laden, and a third animal was given the chief, who was also to take his own pony along.

Two horses were likewise well laden for Buffalo Bill, and it was decided to start just before dawn, so as to get clear of the cabins before the men turned out.

A good night’s rest and the start was made, the weather being terribly cold; but, wrapped up as they were, neither the scout nor the Indian chief felt it.

A farewell to Sule Ross, and they were off, the snow singing under the hoofs of their horses, and all Yellow Dust City asleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUSPICIOUS TRACKS.

Buffalo Bill led the way, leading his two pack horses. The Indian chief followed, with his two packs and pony in lead.

The Golden Arms was passed, the colonel’s saloon, and a large group of cabins. There were signs of life in but few.

On they went, the cabins growing less frequent, until, after a couple of miles, the last one was left behind.

The trail was the same that Buffalo Bill had led the band of twenty-seven into Yellow Dust by.

The gray of dawn was upon them, however, before they reached the last cabin, and Buffalo Bill’s keen gaze was upon the trail.

He saw that it had been broken just beyond the last cabin!

There were the tracks of horses, three in number, he saw after inspection.

The scout at once said:

“This is suspicious, chief.”

“Trail?”

“Yes, new trail.”

“Three pony; go our trail; mean bad!”

“You are reading well, chief; they do mean bad. There is nothing to call men on this trail out of Yellow Dust City in this weather.”

The chief nodded.

“These tracks are only an hour or so old.

“There are three horses, and Scalplock Sam had three pards left. They evidently saw Sule Ross making up the packs last night in his store, surmised that you were to start this morning, concluded that you would go before day, so went out to meet you.”

The chief again nodded.

“A mile from here over that ridge is the very place for an ambush. The trail winds around a cedar thicket, in the edge of which is a group of bowlders, and there they are.”

“Good place.”

“Oh, yes, for them, and for us, for we can strike through this canyon, get in the rear of the thicket, leave our horses, and come up behind the three men.”

“Heap so, Big Chief.”

With this the scout turned off the trail leading over the ridge, rode through a canyon that cut it in twain, and then toward a pine thicket.

Here the horses were left, and on foot the scout and the Indian went through the thicket until near its edge.

There were the bowlders, as Buffalo Bill had said, and a voice suddenly called out:

“Git out, Tom, and see if yer see ’em coming, fer I’ll bet big money ther scout is with ther red.”

“If he do be?”

“Plug him, too, for we kin git back afore Yellow Dust is a stirrin’, and the coyotes will make short work of ther bodies.”

The man Tom walked out to the edge of the pines and called back:

"I don't see 'em yit."

"Hands up, there!"

There were yells of fright, shots, and, as Buffalo Bill sprang down from a rock, he confronted the man who had gone into the trail and who was too dazed to know what to do.

"Surrender, or you go under!"

Up went his hands, and he cried:

"Don't shoot, pard, for we hain't road agents, but jist hunters."

"Yes, hunting that Indian chief's life and mine. Come, you have got to take the news back to Yellow Dust that you made a failure in your assassin act."

With this the scout disarmed the man and led him into the thicket.

The fellow turned more deathly pale and shuddered as he saw his two comrades. Both were dead; near them stood the Indian chief.

His wistful gaze was upon their heads, and he was raising their scalplocks, in his mind.

"Bring their horses here, chief," ordered the scout.

The three horses were brought from back in the thicket.

"Mount, sir!"

The man obeyed.

Instantly he was bound securely to his saddle, and his hands tied behind his back.

Buffalo Bill then drew off his heavy gloves, and, fishing a pencil and slip of paper out of his pocket, he wrote:

"To

"COLONEL CAMP,
"Golden Arms.

"I send you a prisoner and two dead men.

"They will be readily recognized as the pards of the late Scalplock Sam.

"They discovered that I was to leave this morning with the Indian, so went out ahead to ambush us, and I heard from their own lips that they intended to kill us both.

"We thwarted them.

"Sincerely yours,

"WILLIAM F. CODY,

"Buffalo Bill,

"Chief of Army Scouts."

This was pinned upon the breast of the prisoner; then the bodies of the two dead men were strapped upon their horses, the three animals were then tied together with a lariat, and, taken into the trail, were started back to Yellow Dust.

They seemed anxious to get there, which was more than the bound prisoner was, for he had dim forebodings that the Secret Vigilantes might wish to interview him.

"Just a half hour's delay, chief; but we'll push along rapidly now and warm up ourselves and our horses," said Buffalo Bill, and, mounting, they set off at a gallop, for it was open traveling then for miles.

CHAPTER XXII.

QUICK RETRIBUTION.

The man whose face was turned toward Yellow Dust City, and who had not the power to check his horse, or

remove the placard Buffalo Bill had placed upon his breast, was truly in a dangerous predicament.

If he happened to first meet a friend he might escape dire vengeance; but the chances were that he would first come upon those who were not his friends; he was pretty sure to ride against a member of the Secret Vigilantes.

His two dead pards, strapped over their saddles, were an appalling reminder of what might be in store for him.

On he went. The first cabin was passed. At the next some men gazed curiously at him, but he was undisturbed.

The horses kept direct on the trail, and the trail led up to the center of the camps.

Could he not halt them? Could he not turn them off at the trail leading to his own cabin?

Had he done so he would have found cold comfort there.

The body of Scalplock Sam and that of his dead comrade were there, and no watcher stood guard over the dead, for the three had gone to kill the Indian chief.

Nearing the turn-off the bound rider tried by word and movement to induce the horses to go that way.

As it was their home, they might have done so, but a group of miners came along the trail going to their work. They struck into the main trail before the three horses reached the one their rider wished them to take.

With amazement they gazed upon the coming horses, tried to head them off, and, in doing so, started them into a run.

The scared animals dashed by them and kept straight on up to the center of the camps.

The miners followed on the run. Others came out of their cabins and joined in the chase.

At last, the horses halted at the cabin of Sule Ross. He caught them, glanced at the placard, and said:

"Biter bitten, eh? I'll take you to the colonel."

He led the strange outfit to the Golden Arms, and the trail was now full of miners who had followed the grim cavalcade.

"Ho, Ross, what have you there?"

It was the Sport from Shasta who asked the question, and being up so early, it appeared as though he had not been to bed.

"This man has a letter for Colonel Camp," answered Sule Ross.

"It doubtless contains interesting news. I'll join you," the sport announced.

The colonel came out of the Golden Arms as the storekeeper arrived, leading the horses.

"A letter for you, colonel."

"Where is it, Ross?"

"That man has it."

"Give it to me, my man—why, bless my soul, he is bound, and—why, those men are dead."

"Yes, the horses brought them to my cabin, and I saw that the letter was to you, so led them over."

"It is one of Scalplock Sam's men!"

"The whole three are. I guess the quintette has but one representative now, colonel."

The colonel pulled the paper from the breast of the man, who was as pale as a corpse.

He read it, then said:

"Listen to this, my friends."

Over a hundred men were about the tavern—all impatient to know the meaning of what they saw before them, to know what story that paper told.

In a loud, distinct voice the colonel read the lines written to him by Buffalo Bill, and a loud murmur ran through the crowd.

"This is a case for the Secret Vigilantes, colonel."

"I think so, Sam."

"No need of a trial."

"None."

"Buffalo Bill's letter condemns him and sentences him."

"Certainly."

"Let us hang him then," and the Shasta Sport spoke in a matter-of-fact way that was terrible to the poor wretch.

"I hardly think Buffalo Bill could have wished his letter thus construed," said Sule Ross.

"He tells the story of this man's guilt."

"Very true, but did not suggest hanging him."

"Not being here himself, his letter stands as a witness against this intended murderer, and I say hang him."

"He certainly is guilty," assumed the colonel.

"I do not deny that, but he is the last of his gang, and so let him go at that," urged Sule Ross.

"Men, do you not say this man should hang, that Yellow Dust City would be the better off for it, and it serve as an example and warning that we will not tolerate lawlessness and murder here?"

Sunflower Sam thus appealed to the crowd.

There answered him a roar of affirmatives.

"What if he had killed that Indian chief? Why, we would have had in the spring thousands of warriors here to avenge him."

"What if he had killed Buffalo Bill, the great army scout? Why, we would have a military post planted right here!"

"Men, this man must hang!"

This seemed the opinion of all, and the words of the Shasta Sport raised yells at once to hang him.

"Hang him!"

"He deserves it!"

"It will be a good example."

"Buffalo Bill treated him white last night, and then that fellow wanted to kill him."

These were the cries, and there was not a dissenting voice now, save the victim's.

He cried loudly for mercy, and begged for his life, if only for a few days.

The crowd was deaf to entreaty, and, thoroughly infuriated now, they dragged him from his horse, and ten minutes after he was swinging in midair, having been drawn up by many willing hands over the limb of a tree that had served time and again before for a gallows, and had the names of the hanged ones cut into the bark of the trunk.

The Scalplock Sam gang had been wiped out!

CHAPTER XXIII.

DIVIDED TRAILS.

Buffalo Bill rode on rapidly after leaving the scene of the ambush.

His face was stern set, his eyes burning, for the scenes he had been forced into during the past twelve hours cut him to the quick. It was a terrible thing to take human life, even in self-defense.

After a brisk canter of several miles over the plain, which the winds had swept of the snow, he drew rein and went at a low pace.

He did not care to overtax the horses. He knew that it was a good two days' ride to the Indian village, and equally that far to the camp of his Crippled Crew.

He had in his mind a place where he could camp for the night, where man and beast could find fairly good shelter from the cold.

Then he and the chief would go separate ways, and each would strive to reach his destination before another night.

In spite of his confidence in the Indian, he did not care to let him know just where he was going.

By the trail he was then following he could, by a wide flank movement, go to the fort, and so he let the chief believe that he was going there, but to pick up some of his scouts on the way.

It would not do to let the Indian know that there was a band of crippled palefaces not seventy-five miles from their village.

Though the chief might be square, there were young bucks in his tribe who would very quickly go hunting for the scalps of the crippled men, in spite of the severe winter.

As they rode together that day the scout did all in his power to let the chief know that the palefaces were as numerous as the leaves of the trees, that their villages were scattered over thousands of miles, and that it would be best for him and his people to bury the hatchet and live in peace with them.

Did they not do so it would be a continual warfare, and many of his braves would be killed, his villages destroyed, and they would be driven further and further from their hunting grounds.

The chief listened as one who realized that the scout told the truth and spoke for his good.

At last he said:

"Me think heap, talk little. Me no forget. Great White Chief talks with straight tongue. Death Hand his brother, and he brother of Death Hand."

The scout was pleased with this much concession from the powerful leader of a big tribe. It meant a great deal.

The ride all day was a bitter cold one, and both horses and riders felt it; but toward sunset the scout turned into one of those sheltered, cedar-clad valleys, so frequently found in the wilds of the West, as though Nature had placed them there for suffering humanity.

There was a stream there, though it was frozen solid, and a sheltered camping-place for men and horses among some boulders.

The pack saddles, rubber blankets, and some cedar boughs Buffalo Bill cut made a retreat for the two men, and pine straw was piled up among the rocks for the horses, which were also securely blanketed.

A large fire was built; the scout was the cook, and, having killed a fine deer before camping, he had a supper that was most acceptable, after the long, hard ride of over fifty miles.

Smoking their pipes after supper, the two comrades, so strangely brought together, wrapped themselves in their blankets, and were soon fast asleep.

The sun was rising when they awoke, and a good breakfast followed, with another good feed of grain for the horses.

Then it was mount and away, and after several miles the scout halted.

Pointing down the valley, he said:

"I go this way, chief. You keep this mountain trail to your village."

"Me know."

"You will get there by night, I guess, and your people will be glad to see you."

"Heap glad."

"You can tell them that the palefaces are their friends, if they will let them be, and to think of them so, and not let a few bad white men turn them against us."

"We have been foes, chief, for I have followed your trail, and you have followed mine; but we are friends now, brothers. Good-by!"

The bronze-like face of the Indian became mobile; its hardness softened; its stern features revealed the heart away back under the broad breast, and, grasping the hand of Buffalo Bill, as though unable to utter a word, he rode away in silence.

For some time the scout watched him, yet he never looked back, but steadily plodded on his trail, leading his two pack horses and the pony after him in single file.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ARRIVAL.

Buffalo Bill watched the Chief Death Hand until he was out of sight, and then mused:

"Well, he has been an uncompromising foe of the whites, but has always fought us hard and asked no mercy, shown none."

"But now he has seen that the whites are his friends, if he will allow them to be, and after his treatment in Yellow Dust City, he will change his views."

"I am hoping for this to lay the foundation of peace with the mountain tribes, and if it does not I will be greatly mistaken and disappointed as well."

"Now to push on to the camp of my Crippled Crew, for I do not care to be caught out to-night without shelter."

"Come, horses, it is a hard ride, but good quarters and a long rest when you get there."

So saying, the scout pressed on his way, at a pace he knew the horses could hold.

He had never been over that part of the country before, but his great experience prevented him from feeling any uneasiness as to his ability to find his way.

His horses were beginning to feel the strain, for he did not halt at noon, fearing the cold would stiffen the animals, when he came upon a landmark he knew.

It was the spot where he came upon the trail of the crippled fugitives.

The sun was then nearing the horizon, and the wind was rising, betokening another storm, so he was glad

to feel that in half an hour he would reach the camp of the maimed men.

Soon after the canyon came into view, and there, curling up along the side of the cliff, he saw the smoke from the cabin.

The Crippled Crew were yet alive; and more, they were cooking their supper, for the odors of broiling bacon came to him on the wind blowing down the deep mountain rift.

Next the cabin came in sight, and he saw a man, with one wooden leg, swinging an ax in a very good way for one who had been so maimed only a few weeks before.

"Ho, Captain Boyd, that is doing well for a cripple!"

The woodcutter dropped his ax, hopped to a tree, where leaned his rifle, and turned quickly.

"Why, Mr. Cody! You startled me, I can tell you."

"Ho, men, Buffalo Bill is here!"

His voice rang out, and the men hastened out of the cabin.

They came with a cheer, too, and crowded around the scout, greeting him as their preserver and best friend.

"I brought you some more supplies, sooner than I expected, and as I came along I killed two deer. How are you all?"

"All alive, sir, and doing splendidly. Those who lost a foot are using home-made wooden legs, and those who lost a hand are doing the hunting and moving about work for the outfit."

"But Surgeon Powell is not with you, sir?"

"No, I left him at the fort, and guided General Easton over to Yellow Dust City, so I came from there."

"Any news there, Mr. Cody?"

"Yes, Boyd, considerable. We will talk it over to-night, for there are men there who are most anxious as to your fate."

"You did not tell them, sir?" asked Bert Boyd, with a tone and look of anxiety.

"Not a word. They think you all must have perished in the storms."

"You see, as a band, they thought it would be well to hit the Blue Belts first and hard, and so you were the sufferers."

"But they did not accomplish all they expected, as other lawless acts have followed."

"Yes, they did not get the right ones," said Boyd, bitterly.

"Not altogether. There are a few of the lawless element still left in Yellow Dust City as I can vouch for, though there has been another thinning out, let me tell you, of five in one lot, then five in another."

"Who were they, sir?"

"The first five were Chin-Chin Jim and four men, three of whom were killed and two are prisoners at the fort."

"They are guilty, as I know."

"Then Scalplock Sam and his four comrades came next."

"Good! They were a hard quintette and richly deserved hanging."

"I will tell you about it to-night, for now I wish to look after my well-nigh used up horses, and get these supplies indoors, for it seems I have brought a storm with me," and Buffalo Bill pointed to the darkening skies.

CHAPTER XXV.

ACCOUNTED FOR.

Seated in the comfortable cabin of the Crippled Crew, smoking his pipe after a very hearty supper, Buffalo Bill listened to the howling winds and driving sleet without, and congratulated himself upon having reached such good quarters ahead of the storm.

He also wondered if the Indian chief had reached his village ahead of the storm, though he felt no anxiety regarding him, as he knew it would not be severe enough to check him on the way when he was so near his people.

The Crippled Crew were as pleased as a lot of school-boys at the arrival of the scout, and listened to his story of his adventures since he left with the greatest of interest.

"There is one consolation, at least, for us, Mr. Cody."

"What is it, Boyd?"

"Why, if it had not been for our misfortunes, you would not have found General Easton and his party, and consequently they would have perished in that blizzard."

"That is true, and a cheerful way of looking at it, too."

"But now let me tell you of the happenings at Yellow Dust City and give you all another grain of comfort, too, for had it not been for your exile and sufferings I would not have found Death Hand, the Indian chief, dying in the snow, saved his life, and, I hope, laid the foundation thereby for a peace between his tribe and the whites."

"He came with me part of the way upon my journey here, and returns to his people with a strange story to tell of the palefaces who were his foes."

"I hope, sir, he does not know we are here."

"No, indeed!"

"You see, we have suffered so much and are not yet accustomed to being crippled, so it makes us timid," Boyd explained.

"I do not wonder at it in the least."

Then Buffalo Bill went over all the happenings at Yellow Dust City, the men all most attentive, and now and then making comments and asking questions.

"Do you go back to Yellow Dust City from here, sir?" asked Boyd, after a significant glance around at his comrades.

"No, I shall go to the fort from here."

"And when will you return here, sir?"

"I will leave when the weather permits, remain at the fort until I can get a chance to return here between storms, and Surgeon Powell will accompany me."

"We will also bring horses needed, and come prepared to take you away, for I do not think, now you are all improving so rapidly, there is any need of your remaining here all the winter."

"The fact is, I will need you, Boyd, and I feel that I can guide you away between the storms."

"Where do you wish us to go, sir?"

"To Yellow Dust City."

The Crippled Crew looked at each other in a strange way, and then Boyd asked:

"We will be under your protection, sir?"

"Yes, and Surgeon Powell's."

"We will go, sir."

"You will also be under the protection of Storekeeper

Sule Ross, Colonel Camp, and others whom you can trust wholly."

"In fact, the lawlessness that has disgraced Yellow Dust City for so long I am determined shall cease, and there will soon be a wipe-out there of the evil element that will long be remembered, and more, it will be a warning to other law breakers to keep under cover or leave."

"You have made some important discoveries, then, Mr. Cody?"

"Yes; I have found out that a band is there in comparison to which yours was nothing in the desperado line."

"I knew that the twenty-seven who pursued you to your cruel fate were banded together secretly, and have done untold mischief."

"Whether there are more belonging to that outfit I have not yet discovered, but there is one who is doing detective work for me there, and he will find out. He will spot every law breaker in Yellow Dust."

"Do you mind saying who he is, sir?"

"It is Sule Ross."

"The very man for the work, sir."

"You see, I can now account for two-thirds of your torturers."

"Indeed, sir? You certainly have been doing good work, sir."

"I have had good help, and circumstances have aided me."

"Was not Scalplock Sam and his gang a part of the band who pursued us?"

"They were not. Scalplock Sam had only his four followers, and they acted separately from all others."

"I did not know this for certain, but suspected it; still, we had an idea that Scalplock was the leader of the twenty-seven."

"He was not. It was told me by the two prisoners who have gone with Captain Adams to the fort, that Chin-Chin Jim was the leader."

"No! no! that can't be so."

"I know that, for he was an entirely different style of man; but I will ferret him out all right, that leader."

"I hope so, sir."

"Of the twenty-seven, I can account for Chin-Chin Jim and his four, for they were along, and the two who died on the trail returning to Gold Dust."

"Seven."

"Yes, and two men died after reaching Gold Dust, and two lost a limb each."

"Eleven. The two last got some of the medicine they gave us."

"Yes, so are exempt from punishment, in my opinion."

"All goes as you wish, sir."

"That left sixteen, and out of that number I can positively spot eight."

"Good!"

"And the remaining eight Sule Ross will discover, as also any other black sheep deserving of a rope cravat, by the time we reach Yellow Dust."

"We are subject to your orders, Mr. Cody."

"But now, sir, I wish to tell you the secret I hinted at, when you were here before."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CRIPPLED CREW'S SECRET.

What it could be that Bert Boyd was so anxious to make known to him Buffalo Bill could not guess.

He saw that the leader and his men certainly had something which they deemed of great importance to communicate.

"See here, Boyd, let me say this to you, that if you are going to tell me anything to incriminate yourselves, don't do so. You have suffered most terribly, be your crimes what they may, and that, in my mind, atones for what you have done.

"Others will doubtless think as I do, and all I expect of you is to go your way in future on a different trail from the one you set out to follow in Yellow Dust City.

"For this reason I take you back to Yellow Dust, instead of to the fort, where I fear a certain influence might be brought to bear to try you, without taking into consideration what you have already suffered.

"Don't tell me, therefore, anything to mitigate against yourselves."

The men looked at each other and smiled, when Bert Boyd replied:

"You don't mind if we say a word in our favor, Mr. Cody, that may make you think less hard of us?"

"No, indeed!"

"Then, sir, I wish to tell you that we have been playing an underhand game in Yellow Dust."

"I have heard of your being card sharps and worse."

"It is not that. We are, in a measure, card sharps, for each one of us was a skilled hand with the pasteboards; but, sir, we were not professionals—we never cheated a man at a game in our lives, or, if one of us did so, I have yet to know of it."

Buffalo Bill looked surprised, but said nothing, and Boyd continued:

"You see, we appeared what we were not. We went to Yellow Dust and invested in a mine. We looked for little profit from it, and yet we struck it rich."

"Indeed? Rich in what respect?"

"Why, finding the mine was paying well, we hid our gold as we dug it, except what we sent East, and what we lived on.

"This output we did not let the men of Yellow Dust know about. We went about life there in our own way, did not mingle much individually with the people, but were always around.

"We played cards for a purpose, yet were almost invariably successful.

"We kept together because we did not care for trouble, and so were too strong for any few desperadoes to pick a quarrel with, or jump upon, except in several cases, and then we came out on top."

"I have heard that your band was thoroughly organized, and more—that you were a very dangerous lot."

Boyd smiled and replied:

"Far more dangerous, sir, than any man in Yellow Dust City for a moment imagined."

"They seemed to have sized you up very well, Boyd."

"No, sir, not in the slightest degree. Why, Mr. Cody, with all your cleverness, you do not know us as we really are."

Buffalo Bill shook his head doubtfully, as he returned:

"I saw nothing of you as a band in Yellow Dust City but Sule Ross did, and I have great faith in him."

"What does he say, sir?"

"That you were card sharps, held dangerous sway but were not, in his opinion, as bad as some believed."

"I thank him for that much, at least, sir.

"But we deceived even him, as we have done all others. Now, to ask you a question, Mr. Cody. Do you recall the great Phoenix Bank robbery of several years ago?"

"Yes, I have heard of it."

"The robbers got away with a very large sum in bank notes."

"Yes, and killed the cashier, did they not?"

"Yes, sir, and the watchman, as well as a policeman and detective who tried to capture them. Yet the robbers got away, and all trace of them was lost."

"There were five, if I remember rightly."

"Yes, five of them, and the bank, the city, the police, and the detective force all offered rewards for the capture of those men—in all a sum amounting to fifty thousand dollars. A fund was also raised to defray the expenses of any detectives who would track them down.

"It was accepted by the chief of a detective bureau in Texas, and he set to work to ferret out the trail of those robbers and murderers.

"While doing so he discovered another trail of crime, namely—that there was a large band of counterfeiters at work, and their fraudulent money was so well made, so skillfully put upon the public, that it was doing the government a great deal of harm.

"Where these counterfeiters were was the question none could solve; but this chief of whom I spoke felt that he had a clew connecting the Phoenix Bank robbers and murderers with these very counterfeiters. He, in fact, struck a double trail, and determined to follow it to the end.

"At last the trail grew warmer, and, confident that he was right on the scent, he got his best men together and led them upon it.

"Mr. Cody, this chief discovered that the men he sought, robbers, murderers, and counterfeiters were out in the mining country. He knew that the counterfeit money was distributed from Yellow Dust mining camps, and was made there. So he went there with his men and turned miners.

"I am that chief detective, and my crippled pals there are all that remain of our band of fifteen ferrets."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STORY TOLD.

To say that Buffalo Bill was surprised would be to put it mildly. That these ferrets had outgeneraled him as well as all of the dwellers in Yellow Dust City, was simply amazing.

Not a hint had been heard from any one that they were other than they professed to be—miners of the rather rough and tough order.

They had gone to the mines to win the bold game they were playing, and so well had they carried out their disguise that they had actually been driven out of the camps as desperadoes, as men too lawless in their acts to be tolerated even there.

Seeing that Buffalo Bill was wholly astonished, Boyd went on:

"You see, Mr. Cody, we did not intend to be trapped in any way. We brought no sign or badge, paper, or anything to vouch for us; but you may have heard of Boyd Burton."

"Yes, I have, for I knew of him through an army officer who got him to do some important detective work for him several years ago."

"Well, I am Boyd Burton, and I simply transferred my name into Burt Boyd."

"I see."

"We were not idle while in Yellow Dust City, for we discovered just who the counterfeiters are."

"That is good."

"And more; they are the very men we wanted to find as the robbers and murderers in the Phoenix Bank affair."

"Better still!"

"Now, there is one thing I suspect—that some one of the gang recognized me, or, perhaps, one of my men, as being a detective, and for this reason we were spotted, and the charge put against us that we were desperadoes and lawless."

"That may have been."

"It must have been, for you know we were accused of secret murder, of cheating at cards, of robbing the cabins of miners while they were away, and of holding up men who had money, when they would be going home at night."

"Yes, I heard all that."

"Now, of not one of those things has a single man of my band been guilty, and I am very sure that I have not."

"You should know, and the purpose of this was what do you think?"

"Why, to get us all hanged; that was their object; to wipe us out and so be rid of any danger that our presence in Yellow Dust City might imply for them."

"You must be right, Boyd."

"Well, as they did not get us hanged, and the Secret Vigilantes simply exiled us, drove us out of the camps, it did not suit those who sought our destruction."

"I think I begin to see matters as they really are, Captain Boyd."

"I hope so. We know, now, who they really are, and we are convinced that those who drove us out did not intend we should escape thus. They followed us, and, as you have seen, their intention was to destroy us."

"It was, indeed."

"Exiled, if we really were detectives, we could return and lay hands upon the men we had spotted. To render this impossible, we were maimed and turned loose to die, to starve, to freeze."

"You saved us, or, at least, the remnant of our force which you now see before you, enough of us yet to crush our foes, as I pray we may."

"When we were driven out, Sunflower Sam, the Shasta Sport, generously bought our mine, paying us a large sum for it. Of course, we feel kindly toward him; but, all he paid to us we were robbed of, for you know our torturers robbed us of everything."

"Yes, I know."

"And you say you know all of the twenty-seven, or

your pard, Sule Ross will have all known by the time you return?"

"He certainly will."

"That is all we ask. We each have a wrong to avenge, and we will avenge it, through your kind aid. We will gladly return with you to Yellow Dust City. In two weeks more we will be well able to stand the ride."

"I am glad to hear you say this. I will go to the fort as soon as the weather permits, and then get Surgeon Frank Powell. With him I will return here between the storms, and then again, taking advantage of the weather, we all will go to Yellow Dust City."

"I have already told Sule Ross that we would arrive by night and go direct to his cabin, where you all can hide until I spring the trap which I shall set for the remainder of the twenty-seven. Then the people of Yellow Dust shall know the whole truth about this persecution of you and your men, and be informed of your true character."

Such was the plan adopted, and talking it all over with the Crippled Crew, each one approved it heartily.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

READY TO SPRING THE TRAP.

Buffalo Bill remained three days in the camp of the maimed detectives; the storm lasted for that time.

Then he started for the fort, having with him a pack horse to provide for delays or accidents by the way.

The third day at noon he reached the fort.

The sentinel reported his coming, and he had a reception of which he might well feel proud.

Captain Charlie Adams and his men had reached the cabin stockade in the driving storm, as Buffalo Bill supposed they would. They had found shelter there for man and beast, had remained until the blizzard ended, then they had gone on to the fort, where Buffalo Bill had been given full praise for the saving of the coach.

Colonel Lennox greeted him most cordially, and feeling that he could then tell the secret he had kept to himself, he made known to his commander all about his Crippled Crew in the Death Valley Mountains, who they were, and just what had been their mission.

The colonel was astonished at what he heard, but said he would leave it all to his chief of scouts to carry out in his own way; yet advised that it would be well to send Captain Adams and his troop to Yellow Dust.

"If it can be arranged, sir, so that he reaches there about the time we do it would be a great help to us," was Buffalo Bill's opinion on that point.

"Well, you can arrange that with Captain Adams, for I believe you would prefer him to go."

"Ah, yes, sir; for he understands just what to do in the right moment and does it."

"Then you see him," said Colonel Lennox.

That night Buffalo Bill had a long talk with Surgeon Powell, and that officer was also greatly surprised at what the scout had to tell him.

"Of course, I am with you, Bill," he said, "with you, if it leads to death!"

The next day it was a talk with Captain Charlie Adams, and he being also let into the secret, said:

"I shall take forty men with me, at least, Cody, and

"you can just tell me when to be there, and depend upon it we will be."

So it was arranged, and, after a week spent at the fort, Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell left one morning early just after a clearing up of the weather, and started on the trail to the camp of the exiled detectives.

They carried with them extra horses, and made the ride by easy stages, stopping the first night at the stockade cabin.

The day after their departure Captain Charlie Adams and forty men, not including a lieutenant, started for the stockade cabin, there to stop a couple of days, another two at the Cave Canyon, and then to push on to Yellow Dust City.

Should the weather come on to storm, then it was understood that the captain and his men would retreat to the stockade cabin, and the night of the second day after the clearing up they would ride into Yellow Dust City, for Buffalo Bill had arranged to get there about that time.

Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell made the camp of the Crippled Crew the second day after leaving the fort, arriving at noon.

They were greeted with the greatest cordiality.

Examining his patients, Surgeon Powell found them all in good condition, and said that they were fully able to take the long ride.

But as the weather was threatening again, it was decided to remain in camp until it cleared again before starting.

This was accordingly done, and when the weather cleared the start was made.

The men had become accustomed to the loss of their limbs and got along better than the scout had anticipated they would.

It was midnight of the third day that they came in sight of the lights of Yellow Dust City.

Without attracting the attention of any one; in fact, not being seen by any one, they rode into the yard of Sule Ross, and Buffalo Bill, having ridden on ahead, had prepared for their welcome.

Their horses were soon put away, and they had comfortable quarters in the house of the storekeeper.

"A troop of cavalry arrived at the Golden Arms not half an hour ago," announced Sule Ross.

"That is all right, Ross; it is part of the programme. Now tell me what else you know."

"Every man of that band, Bill. I'll go up to the colonel's to-night and have him call the people to a meeting at noon, and then you can strike your blow," was the answer.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BUFFALO BILL CONFRONTS THE KINGPIN SCOUNDREL.

Buffalo Bill appeared in Yellow Dust City the next morning to the surprise of the miners going to their work, for, after his departure with the Indian chief, many feared that he had been lost in the blizzards.

The coach of Bob White had made a run back again to Yellow Dust City, bringing several officers on their way to the fort, and the driver himself had undertaken to guide them through, taking advantage between storms to do so.

They had gotten through there by hard riding, and in the same way Bob White had returned, accompanied by several men whose terms of enlistment had expired.

As the driver had himself gone, it was thought at Yellow Dust City that he was carrying the general's dispatches that Buffalo Bill had intended to take.

Upon the return from the fort Bob White and the men with him had been held up by several masked men right out of Yellow Dust City, and the poor soldiers had been robbed of all their pay, which was considerable.

They were still in Yellow Dust, awaiting to get away and not knowing just what to do.

Where Buffalo Bill had gone with the Indian chief, the people of Gold Dust could not imagine, for Bob White had reported the scout as not having returned to the fort.

Yet here he was in Yellow Dust again, coming alone, it was supposed, while at the same time Captain Adams and his troop had arrived. It was thought the troop was to convoy some one to the fort expected on the coach when Bob White should next bring it through.

That night at the saloon the colonel had given the crowd to understand that an important capture had been made, by whom, where, or who it was he did not say, but it was intended to let it be known that day at noon.

Then the fate of the captured, whoever it might be, would be settled, and the crowd were all told to be on hand.

Before the hour, however, Buffalo Bill left the cabin of Sule Ross to go up to the Golden Arms.

The day was a complete change from what the weather had been of late, having come off almost warm, and the sun was shining brightly.

Great coats were thrown aside, and the men, not caring to go to work, to give it up and be on hand at noon, were loitering about the saloons, the store, and the Golden Arms.

Captain Adams had not yet appeared, and his men were keeping close about the tavern or the stables.

As he reached the Golden Arms, Buffalo Bill saw the Shasta Sport approaching him.

Buffalo Bill did not have his overcoat on, merely a jacket, and if he was armed the weapons were well concealed, but that he was armed might well be surmised knowing what kind of a place Yellow Dust City was.

The Sport from Shasta, always fond of dress, was now rigged up in his best, having on a new silk shirt, the front of which was embroidered with three of the big filigree sunflowers—his distinguishing emblem.

He carried a revolver on one side in front, another on his hip as was his wont, and wore about his neck a charm which never was wanting when he appeared in public.

It was an opal set in gold and swung about his neck by a chain. In truth, it was a woman's necklace.

Seeing Buffalo Bill, he halted, turned toward him, and called out:

"I am glad to see you back, Mr. Cody, and, from what the colonel tells me, I guess you brought in last night some material for the Secret Vigilantes to-day."

The Sport extended his hand, and Buffalo Bill grasped it with a grip that meant "business," for Sunflower Sam, strong as he was, winced.

Holding the hand in this clutch, the scout said:

"Sunflower Sam, I arrest you as the chief of the worst

gang of cutthroats that ever disgraced even a mining camp."

Still grasping the hand of the now white-faced Sam, with his right hand, Buffalo Bill clutched in his left a small derringer pistol, a most terrible weapon at close quarters, the muzzle pointed toward the sport.

Though he had turned deadly pale, the man from Shasta remained outwardly calm. He could not release his hand from the steel-like grasp. He dared not make a move with his disengaged hand to draw his revolver.

The crowd had seen and heard what was said by Buffalo Bill, and were gathering fast about them, though not a man had been very near when they first met.

Among those appearing were the colonel, Carl Waring and Sule Ross.

As Ross came up Buffalo Bill gave the order:

"Put the steels upon him, Ross!"

Instantly the storekeeper obeyed, and the Sunflower Sport was manacled and disarmed at the same time.

"See here, Cody, a joke can be carried too far," protested the sport.

"This is no joke, Shasta, as you well realize. The law has got you fast at last."

"Colonel, what does this outrage mean?" demanded the sport, scrutinizing the crowd.

Buffalo Bill looked toward Sule Ross, who said in a low tone:

"All here, chief!"

The scout saw that about half the population of Yellow Dust City were there, and the other half were coming as fast as they could make their way.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE EVIL SPIRIT OF IT ALL.

As the crowd gathered out of the Golden Arms came Captain Charlie Adams, and his men immediately began to form around the multitude, but not pressing toward the center, but passing on the outer edge of the crowd.

Then, at a signal from Ross, the scout said in his terse way:

"Men, I have struck at your idol, it is true, but I know what I am about, and I accuse him first of being a murderer, robber and fugitive from justice, one who planned and led the work in the Phoenix Bank burglary, of which many of you have heard."

"It is false!" yelled the disarmed sport.

"It is true. That, however, is but a part of his criminal record, a minor part. Well born and bred, he went wrong early in life from the innate deviltry in his nature. He is an adept forger, and an expert counterfeiter of United States money—hold there!

"The man who attempts to leave this crowd will be shot dead!"

The movement of men in the assembled host to draw toward the outer edge of the circle was checked by this warning.

Then Buffalo Bill resumed:

"Now to the record, men, of this man from Shasta, as he calls himself. He is not from Shasta at all; that dodge was merely one of his blinds. He has here in Gold Dust City his whole outfit for counterfeiting government money, and his accomplices are in this very crowd.

"Suspecting the detectives were here upon his track, he organized the Secret Vigilantes, and at once began to trump up charges against certain men.

"His first blow fell upon the Blue Belts, and he deceived Colonel Camp, Sule Ross, Carl Waring and other good men and true, who associated with him as vigilantes to free the camp from rogues and preserve the peace. It was by his trickery and vile lies that the band of fifteen men were exiled from this camp.

"The charges against them were utterly false and devilish, for these very men, Burt Boyd and his Blue Belts, actually were government detectives here for the purpose of entrapping this human devil and his numerous followers.

"He had in his band, including himself, twenty-seven men. Some of them were road agents, and it was five of his imps who attacked General Easton and his daughter.

"Those twenty-seven, their sport chief being in the lead, went on the trail of the Blue Belts purposely to destroy them.

"They overtook the exiles, robbed them of the money they had, that which the sport had paid for the Blue Belt mine, as well, although it was counterfeit, and then they set to work to destroy them."

"It is false," yelled the prisoner.

"I am dealing in solid facts, good people! I forgot to say that this man was educated as a physician and surgeon, and was a most clever one until he chose a life of dishonor, crime and deep depravity. As Dr. Augustus Norman he was known then, but he dropped his M. D., and his real name long ago.

"However, he practiced surgery right here only a few months ago, for he determined to torture the Blue Belts to death; so, with his obedient miscreants, he cut a foot, or a hand, off of each one of the overpowered men.

"He was well-nigh successful in his fiendish work, for, with utterly diabolical purpose, he turned them loose to die of cold and starvation, maimed as they were!

"But I found the poor maimed victims of this miscreant, found them nearer dead than alive, and all that remains of the Blue Belts, Burt Boyd and six of his comrades, are here to answer for themselves."

Buffalo Bill gave a loud call, and to the amazement of the crowd Burt Boyd came toward them from the cabin of Sule Ross.

It beggars description to describe the scene that followed.

The men spotted by Buffalo Bill and Sule Ross were at once surrounded by the soldiers, and in a short while they, too, were in irons.

The crowd insisted upon hanging them, right then and there, but Buffalo Bill told them that the atrocious scoundrels must be taken East for trial.

Captain Adams and his men surrounded the prisoners, and then Buffalo Bill, Burt Boyd and others picked from the crowd went on a search to the cabins of the assumed Sam and his associates in wickedness. What they found amply repaid them, for the evidence would hang any man.

It was proof of the sport's guilt of the Phoenix Bank robbery, and three men then with him had been his pals in that affair.

The search supplied proof of his forgeries, and all the

counterfeiting outfit was found, as well as the case of surgical instruments with which the monster had amputated the limbs of the unfortunate Blue Belt Brigade detectives.

No further evidence was needed, and all Yellow Dust City was in a furor of excitement over the appalling revelations. Too much could not be done for the Blue Belts, who had so cruelly suffered.

Carl Waring at once bought from them the Blue Belt mine, for the purchase of the sport did not hold good, and Burt Boyd and his men were thus well supplied with money for their trip back.

The guilty men, save the two who had been crippled by freezing, were at once taken to the fort, Buffalo Bill guiding and Captain Charlie Adams and his men guarding.

In safety they arrived, and the surprise sprung upon all at the fort was indeed great. That it won for Buffalo Bill many new laurels may be taken for granted.

He bore his honors modestly, as always, and was appointed by Colonel Lennox to escort the prisoners and their detective squad to the nearest railroad station, when, in the early spring, they left the fort.

This service he duly performed, and upon his return was surprised to find a large Indian trail leading to the fort.

A significant find, and in alarm he hastened on to see what it meant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

CONCLUSION.

The ovation which Buffalo Bill received in Yellow Dust City on his return from the railway station made his heart thrill with pride, and he learned with pleasure that there had not been a man killed nor a lawless act in the camps since the running down of the Sunflower Sport.

When he discovered the Indian trail leading to the post, the scout naturally suspected mischief; but when he drew near he found the Indians encamped there and quickly ascertained that Death Hand and several hundred braves were there having a pow-wow with Colonel Lennox, for the chief had come to ask his paleface friends to bury the hatchet with his tribe and live in peace.

"This is your work, Cody, and so I shall report it to your honor," said Colonel Lennox, and he turned the chief and his braves over to the scout to entertain.

Three months later word came from the East of the trial and conviction of Dr. Augustus Norman, alias Sunflower Sam, the Shasta Sport, and his sentence to be hanged, while his companions in guilt also were condemned to terms of imprisonment, several of them for life.

Burt Boyd wrote Buffalo Bill, offering to share the big rewards with him, but this the generous-minded scout refused emphatically.

Still later the detective chief wrote again, saying that he had reorganized his bureau of secret service men, and had called his corps "Buffalo Bill's Blue Belt Brigade," for never would one of the Crippled Crew forget how much they owed to the matchless pathfinder of the Wild West wilderness.

THE END.

Next week's issue, No. 91, will contain "Buffalo Bill and the Boy Scout; or, The Tenderfoot Trampler of the

Overland." We want you to get acquainted with the boy scout, Ned Osmond, boys. You'll find a full account of his adventures while seeking his fortune on the Overland trail in next week's issue.

It fell to his lot to fight both Indians and outlaws. Buffalo Bill did some wonderful work with his rifle when he came to Ned's assistance.

What the Wind Brought.

(By Earl Baum, Jeannette, Pa.)

Hark! A distant rumbling was borne to my ears by a warm night wind. I stopped, looked, and listened. For the space of a few minutes no sound came to my ears, save that produced by the soft night wind gently stirring the leaves. All I could see around me was the indistinct outline of tall pine trees, beyond which occasional glimpses of the moon could be seen, when not obscured by patches of clouds floating over her face. These were my dismal surroundings.

Again I heard that rumbling sound. Walking forward a few steps, I came to the end of the woods. Here a beautiful sight met my eye. The moon shone forth clear, and, running past my eye, were two silver streaks, stretching west to Death Cut, and east to the Curve. But, what! Do my eyes deceive me? Is there not a break in this shining streak about fifty yards to the left! Yes, and simultaneously with this thought came the rumbling of the nearing train.

Dashing to this break in the silver streak, I saw that a rail had been forcibly taken out and left lying across the track. Hastily grasping one end, I began to work it into place, when, on the warm night air, came the clear and distinct cry, "Halt! Hands up, or you're a dead man!" Greatly startled, I looked up and found the moonbeams shining on the barrel of a revolver pointing at my head, and held by a determined-looking man. Nothing broke the silence for the space of a few seconds. Then into the clutch came the Overland Express, traveling at about fifty miles an hour. Again came that voice, clear and distinct: "Lie down along that track this moment; refuse, and in one moment I'll launch your soul into eternity."

Death stared me in the face in both directions. Making a motion as if to lie down I grasped the rail and, by a few superhuman tugs, placed the rail into a fairly good position. But, crack! crack! Two revolver shots rang out in quick succession. A stinging sensation in my side told me I was shot. Turning my head, the iron monster, with sparks flying from the brakes, was bearing down on me. I struggled fiercely to roll off the track, but was too weak. Nearer came the train, and then came a hard knock, given by my brother, with whom I slept. I was pulling savagely at his leg—trying to place the rail in position. The bedspreeds were all over the floor, put there by my fierce endeavors to get off the track. Being greatly scared at first and wet with perspiration, I lit the lamp, and had no more sleep that night.

10¢ worth of "Trixol," a Make-up, sent postpaid for 25¢ cents stamps or silver. Also a lot of make-up or full beard, Irish or Side Whiskers, and other, send 5¢ stamps to each theme on. Box of Beard Curl to Blacken up, in Rubber Mouth, big tooth, secret & apparatus for performing the great vanishing half-dollar trick. This big offer is to get your address to send my large list, out of place, of the world's age, latest novelties. How many papers you saw this in and I will also put in a Heavy GOLD plate finger Ring FREE, send also. Address Chas. Marshall, Mfr., Longport, N.Y.

CURIOUS DREAMS



Are you still dreaming, boys?
You won't be if you are lucky enough to win a prize.
You'll be wide enough awake then.
But you must dream first, and let us know the result.
Get a move on, before it's too late.
For full particulars, see page 32.

Buffalo Bill's Decoy Boys.

(By Thomas Trudelle, Chicago, Ill.)

I had a very curious dream after reading Buffalo Bill's Decoy Boys.

My friend and I were traveling along one of the old trails that led to Wynkoop settlement, when we were suddenly captured by road agents, who bound us both to trees. When bound, they began shooting at us. My friend was shot in the calf of the leg, but kept on looking square at them. I got loose, and on the ground in front of us were two pair of revolvers. I cut the rope that bound him, and he took his revolvers and I mine. Soon we came to their horses. We jumped into the saddles, and soon were flying away, shooting as we went. But just as I was turning around I felt something like a needle in my back, and I fell out of bed, waking me up.

My Adventures in Western Wilds.

(By Dan Eicher, Ithaca, Mich.)

A short time ago I dreamed a dream I will never forget.

I thought my father owned a cattle ranch in Western Colorado, between two mountains. It was a most beautiful place. One day my father went to the nearest town, which was twenty miles away, leaving me alone with the cattle.

Just as it was getting dusk I started to drive the cattle in the coral. My horse gave a snort. Looking in front of me I saw an animal in my path. I whipped out my old forty-four and fired three shots in quick succession. They took effect. With a scream the animal gave a bound in the air and fell dead. I dismounted to examine it, and found it to be a young mountain lion. To my horror, this was not all. There stood its mother, ready to

finish the fight. She gave an unearthly scream, which frightened my horse. It gave a snort, and bounded away, leaving me alone with only two shots in my revolver. I saw I had to do or die. I raised the weapon and fired the two shots. My aim was not sure, as only one took effect. There I was alone without a thing to defend myself with. The first shot stunned her, the other one tore along her neck, inflicting a deep flesh wound which made her furious. She gave a bound toward me. I turned and ran for my life through the brush. She followed as fast as she could. It was very dark and I was five miles from home. It was a race for life. Although she was crippled, she gained on me for a short distance. With one last effort she gave a bound, but fell short, tearing my coat and scratching me with her claws. Just as she gave another bound I awoke with a start. How glad I was when I found it only a dream!

My Dream of a Haunted Mine.

(By Bessie Mancor, Chieftain, W. Va.)

While visiting my aunt out in the country last summer I had the dream which I now relate.

I was walking along when I heard a cry for help. It came from an old mine. I walked into the opening in the darkness. On and on I walked. I was not afraid. When, all at once, I saw a light in an old room. On going closer I saw a woman dressed in white standing at the entrance of the room. Immediately I beheld the flames of hell shooting up all around me. I turned to run from the mine, when I found my way barred by a great black object. I screamed, and ran deeper into the dark old mine. The old lady heard my scream and gave chase. She caught me in her arms and I awoke, and found myself lying under the bed. I was glad to find it but a dream.

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including an EASTMAN BROWNIE CAMERA and a complete outfit for taking, developing and printing photographs

GET INTO THIS CONTEST

whether you were in the last or not. All you have to do is to remember any Curious Dream you have ever had, write it in five hundred words, or less, and send it with the accompanying coupon, properly filled out, to

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